





THE

# PATRIARCH OF HEBRON:

OR THE

# HISTORY OF ABRAHAM.

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BY THE LATE

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## INTRODUCTION.

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A considerable portion of the Old Testament, consists of brief biographical sketches. These are frequently sketches of characters distinguished for piety and the influence exerted on the destinies of mankind. To preserve an impartial history of such, was an undertaking worthy of inspiration. And to *unfold* that history, and to bring out more prominently the lessons of instruction which it contains, cannot be deemed an unimportant service to the cause of truth and religion.

Two things are especially remarkable in the biography of the scriptures—its *impartiality* and its *condensation*. The former is seen in the fidelity with which, not only the lights, but the shades of the picture are presented. The faults as well as virtues of its subjects, are exhibited with a bold and unsparing hand. If a faithful servant of God is betrayed into some flagrant sin it is recorded without apology or explana-

tion. This is a peculiarity of the scriptures evincive of their divine origin.

The *condensation* of their biographical sketches is not less deserving of notice. A few bold and expressive strokes give you the portrait of the man. In a few leading events of his history, is spread before you the general map of his life. Such a map, however, must necessarily be but an outline. It is yet an outline so constructed, that a little care can often fill it up, supplying what is deficient, and render it beautifully complete.

We may recognize the same style of pencil-ing in the **WORD** as in the **WORKS** of God ; for as in the one “ the invisible things ” pertaining to his character, may to some extent be “ un-derstood by the things that are made ;” so, in the other, much that is undescribed pertaining to the character of men, may be understood by that which is recorded. Light is thrown only on here and there a prominent point, the *bas-relief* of life ; but that light can readily be re-flected and diffused, till many other lineaments of the man are made to appear in almost equal-ly attractive beauty.

He, therefore, who would write a full and faithful history of those worthies, of whom the pen of inspiration has given us the more striking features, and throw over it the warmth and glow of life, should possess something of the same power that is necessary in the philosopher, who would construct a system of natural theology, gathered from the comparatively scanty intimations presented in the physical world. He must seize upon the leading incidents, and draw from them the general thread of life. He must detect in the prominent actions of the man, the elements of his character. He must develope without creating; he must expand without distorting. Fabricating no new materials, he must dissect, analyze, and arrange the few which are furnished to his hand, till he produces a result equally removed from the looseness of fiction and the scantiness of the original record. Some scope must be allowed to the imagination, though never to colour nor add to the historical matter of fact; but only to enliven and adorn it. The line must be preserved distinct between the real and the fanciful;

and the latter introduced simply to assist the reader to a better understanding of the former.

Several things conspire to make the character of Abraham peculiarly interesting to all lovers of history as well as of religion. In the first place, it was a remarkable character in itself, and would have been admired in any age. We find in it a combination and a harmony of traits of rare excellence in our fallen world. And yet it has enough of imperfection to show that it is human. That faith which brought Abraham into close fellowship with God, was the stock whereon were engrafted, or rather wherefrom spontaneously sprung, almost every other virtue which can embellish human life. In him we may see the play of the gentle affections, united with firm and stern attachment to truth and duty. His heart was a fountain of tenderness and love; yet it could collect itself in adamantine strength against the seductions of the world. Prompt to obey the voice of God, he never lost his sympathy with his fellow men, and what may seem stranger than all, diverse as were his sentiments and practices from those

of the rest of mankind, he appears always to have commanded their respect and friendship.

Secondly, he lived at a critical period. He stood at one of those junctures in human affairs, where sometimes every thing depends on a single individual. His life constituted a link in the history of the world, on which the destiny of a hundred generations was suspended. Had he not been called from idolatry ; had he not obeyed the call ; had he been found incompetent to the crisis ; or, had a single leading event in his history failed ; how it might have changed the whole religious aspect of the world to the end of time !

Thirdly, he is presented to us as the head of a great and extraordinary people. There is, therefore, the same interest attached to his life, which we are accustomed to attach to the founder of a mighty nation. For the same reason for which we honour the Pilgrim fathers of New England, should we honour, in a far higher degree, the great ancestor of the Hebrew people.

Another circumstance which contributes richly to the interest of the narrative, is the in-

tercourse maintained between Abraham and Jehovah. More than most other, perhaps more than any other of the ancient saints, he seems to have been directed in all the more important transactions of his life, by the hand of God. In reading the narrative, we are consequently brought into direct contact, as it were, with the Divine Being. This may indeed be affirmed, in relation to every part of the Scriptures ; but in relation to the life of this Patriarch, it is *emphatically* true.

In the preparation of this work, the inspired narrative has been scrupulously followed; with no greater scope being allowed to fancy than appeared necessary, in order to present the facts in the strongest light ; with the introduction here and there of such views of scenery and illustrations of manners, drawn from a variety of sources, not omitting now and then a fragment of tradition or profane history ; and with such inferences of a practical nature, as appeared suited to render the whole pleasing and instructive to the reader. Though originally undertaken for the benefit of the young

especially ; it has not been carefully graduated to the level of juvenile minds ; and it may be read with pleasure and profit, it is hoped, by all who are interested in the history and would imitate the example of the great and good.



THE  
HISTORY OF ABRAHAM.

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CHAPTER I.

STATE OF THE WORLD.

“ And God omnipotent, when mercy failed,  
Made bare his holy arm, and with the stroke  
Of vengeance smote ; the fountains of the deep  
Broke up ; heaven’s windows opened, and sent on men  
A flood of wrath ;—but still they hurried on  
*Determinedly to ruin* : shut their ears,  
Their eyes to all advice, to all reproof—  
O’er mercy and o’er judgment downward rushed  
To misery.”

*Pollok.*

OF all the characters distinguished in the early ages of the world, with which history, whether sacred or profane, has acquainted us, that of the Patriarch of Hebron is, in several respects, the most remarkable. It is true, he was not, in human view, thrown into situations of such critical responsibility, as Moses the lawgiver of Israel ; nor did he perhaps exhibit qualities of such commanding interest as he ;

but his character displays a singular combination of virtues. He presents to us a beautiful variety and balance of excellent qualities, which, considered in connexion with the position he holds in the religious history of mankind, must always impart to the record of his life, a peculiar and delightful interest. Accustomed to regard him simply as the *Father of the Faithful*, we too commonly overlook his other virtues, which are hardly less remarkable than his faith. But a careful observer will perceive in him an illustrious example of the quickening and purifying, the expansive and perfective power of faith on the whole man. He will perceive in his character, not merely a single commanding quality of excellence, throwing lustre over whatever else belongs to it ; but a harmony of substantial virtues—a charming sisterhood of graces ; some of which are the most refined and amiable, constituting, in union with piety, the chief ornament and highest finish of life.

Abraham\* was born about three hundred and fifty years after the deluge. Although so short

\* His name was originally Abram.

a time had elapsed since that terrible display of divine wrath against sin, nevertheless the survivors had almost universally become wicked and corrupt in the sight of God. If they did not imitate the example of the inhabitants of the old world which had so recently been destroyed, they became guilty of practices scarcely less offensive to the pure eye of heaven. It is supposed that the great sin of the Antediluvians was Atheism—a total rejection of the idea of a God, the creator and moral governor of the world. Hence they had no fear of the judgment foretold by Noah as coming upon them. That tremendous judgment, however, came, and swept away the race of Atheists from the earth. The *sons of men*, at least the *daughters of men*, who are strongly distinguished by the sacred historian from the *sons of God*, as if they had become totally estranged from the very knowledge of their Maker, no longer remained to corrupt those of better principles and purer virtue. Notwithstanding these most favourable circumstances, sin abounded more and more.

The earth was now fast becoming re-peopled. The confusion of tongues at the tower of Babel had prepared the way for a separation of families. Those who spoke different languages or dialects, could no longer enjoy each other's society ; and it was necessary, therefore, that the several parties so distinguished, should retire and form each a distinct community. Accordingly different companies were seen travelling in different directions from the plain of Shinar, and spreading themselves farther and farther over the surrounding waste. Some went westward, others eastward, seeking a new home in distant and unexplored regions ; and wherever they settled, they seem rapidly to have increased in numbers and in power. The ruins of the flood were repaired by the patient hand of industry, and villages sprung up in the verdant valleys, where, but a few centuries before, the waters of the deluge rolled with frightful impetuosity.

While thus the population of the world was multiplying in numbers and extending in settlement, the light of religion grew fainter and

fainter,—and at length was almost lost in the general darkness. The almighty hand which had so recently broken up the fountains of the great deep and opened the windows of heaven, and had poured out the vials of wrath upon a guilty race till all but a single family were destroyed, was no more remembered. Idolatry took the place of the worship of the true God ; and men, in forgetting their Maker, gave themselves up to sin without restraint and without shame. So early and abundantly verified was the declaration of God to Noah—“The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.”

Thus irresistibly does the evidence of human depravity meet us even under the most favourable circumstances for the trial of virtue. Never since the fall has there been a period, when the paths of obedience were so free from obstructions, and the paths of transgression so full of terror. Surely, one would have predicted, the survivors of the flood will stand in awe of that sin-avenging God who rolled its desolating tide over the earth, and will teach their children to keep his commandments and shun his wrath.

With that most impressive display of his abhorrence of sin, and his determination to punish it, constantly before them wherever they move, they will not dare to provoke him again to vengeance by forgetfulness of his presence or transgression of his laws. Altars to his worship will be erected in every valley and on every hill, where the marks of his past judgments or the tokens of his returning mercy are seen. Alas, "leviathan is not so tamed!" "The heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." Scarcely are the waters of the deluge dried away, when wickedness again appears in forms almost as odious as before that dreadful display of incensed justice. In a few generations, the condition of mankind had become so deplorably bad, that it seemed as if the world must be totally abandoned; as if God, in righteous indignation, would now withdraw himself from creatures so incorrigibly corrupt, and give them up to perish in their wickedness. The time had come, when they must be abandoned to hopeless ruin, or some new manifestation of the divine being must be made, some yet untried measure adopted for man's recovery.

How plainly does this history teach us, that the terrors of God's justice can never reclaim the sinner. It is true, a promise had been given that the earth should no more be destroyed by a flood; but then this single visitation, though never to be repeated, read and long continued to read a lesson of fearful import, to the survivors and their sons. It proclaimed the truth, that *God is angry with the wicked every day*, and that *the guilty shall not go unpunished*. But it was of little avail. It had no power to restrain from sin. Something besides the judgments of God is necessary to soften the hard heart of man, and dispose him to obey his Maker. It is only when the divine *mercy* appears beaming, like the sun, through the angry clouds which hang over the transgressor, that the springs of life in the soul are effectually touched, its icy obstinacy melted away, and principles of obedience called into efficient action. Terror may deter, for a season, from particular acts of wickedness; but it can never conquer the love of sin, nor implant a principle of holiness. It may drive the guilty wanderer

from this or that evil way, but it can never draw him to God. That mercy which is manifested in a crucified Saviour, foreseen by the ancient saints and more clearly understood by later believers, alone has power to subdue and to renovate. Christ crucified is precisely adapted to the condition of the sinner. The cross makes an appeal to the heart more powerful than the deluge or the fiery doom of Sodom. Hence, says the Saviour, “If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me.” And *looking unto Jesus*, is set forth as the safeguard and surety of success in the spiritual race.

## CHAPTER II.

### CALL OF ABRAHAM.

“ So Abraham by divine command,  
Left his own house to walk with God ;  
His faith beheld the promised land  
And fired his zeal along the road.”

*Watts.*

NOTWITHSTANDING the universal prevalence of wickedness among men, God did not entirely abandon the world. He had purposes of mercy concerning it from the beginning ; and these were not to fail of accomplishment. “ His purposes shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure.” He was not taken by surprise in what had happened. This dreadful state of the world had been foreseen, and special provision made for it. Eternal wisdom had devised a plan to prevent the issue which seemed impending,—a plan, like all others from the same source, beautifully simple, yet admirable in its adaptation to the end. It was merely the singling out of a family from the idolatrous multitude, placing it in circumstances favourable to moral

purity, instructing it in the knowledge of the divine character and will, and preparing it to be, for the race, the depository, the safe keeper of true religion. This was the family of Abraham. For wise reasons he was selected to be the head of that honoured line, which was to preserve the knowledge and the worship of God on the earth, and from which, in due time, was to spring the Redeemer of mankind.

Terah the father of Abraham, was the ninth in a direct line of descent from Noah. He is represented by one of the sacred historians as a worshipper of idols.\* He dwelt in Ur† of the Chaldees, a country lying upon the river Tigris, but the precise boundaries of which are unknown. As the father was an idolater, it is but reasonable to suppose that the son was himself educated in the practice of idolatry, and infected in early life, with the prevailing corruption of the times. Terah had three sons whose names are mentioned in the history—Haran who died in Ur; Nahor who removed to

\* Josh. 24: 2. † There seem to have been both a country and a city of this name.

Haran in Mesopotamia, perhaps during Abraham's sojourn there, (he was grandfather of Rebekah the wife of Isaac,) and Abraham, who appears to have been the youngest.

While still dwelling in Ur, Abraham married Sarah, (then Sarai,) who, as is supposed, was a daughter of Terah by a second marriage, and of course, half sister to her husband. The marriage of near relatives was common in those early times, and, as every one may see, was, under the circumstances that then existed, absolutely necessary. It was therefore tolerated ; tolerated, however, from the nature of things, only as a necessary *evil*.

Immediately after our first introduction to this family by the inspired historian, we find four of the number, Terah, Abraham, Sarah, and Lot, journeying, by a circuitous route, towards the great Western Sea.

“ And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife ; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan.”

They have now left the corrupt society of their tribe, and are wandering apparently almost without aim, in quest of a new abode. But they do not go forth as discontented vagrants nor as restless adventurers. They are led by the divine hand. How rare is it to find men changing their place of abode under such guidance as this! Of the thousands who are seen crossing our mountains and winding along our valleys, how few can be denominated, in this respect, the followers of Abraham! Gain rather than godliness, personal ease rather than the promotion of piety, is the general object.

But how does it come to pass that this family are *led by the divine hand*? We have just left them a family of ignorant idolaters. How, from the worship of idols, have they been brought to put their trust in the God of Heaven, and under his direction, embark on a journey to a distant land?

It does not appear that *Terah* had received any direct instructions or revelations from on high. God passed by the father,—but he

manifested himself to the son,—an instance of his sovereignty by no means uncommon in the world. He appeared to *Abraham*, (as Stephen informs us\*) before he dwelt in Charan, or Haran, and commanded him to remove from his native country.

“Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred and from thy father’s house, unto the land that I will show thee; and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great.”

This divine manifestation, it is evident from the narrative, must have taken place, prior to the first removal of the family. It was a manifestation probably in some visible form, perhaps in the form of an angel as before the destruction of Sodom, or in a dream as in Gerar. God doubtless gave some striking display of his presence and greatness, which carried with it its own evidence, and brought conviction to Abraham’s mind. It is easy for a Being of infinite power and wisdom to find

\* Acts vii. 2.

means for the accomplishment of his purposes. Nor is it, in any degree, a thing incredible, that he should miraculously manifest his existence and his will, to his intelligent creatures. The doctrine of a divine revelation, by which God has made himself known to men, though in one view mysterious, is nevertheless extremely reasonable. It is only the condescension of a father adopting some unusual expedients to make himself known, in the fulness of his benevolent heart, to his ignorant and erring children. What can be more reasonable than this? He who denies the reasonableness of this, must believe, either that God has in his nature more of the *tyrant* than the *father*, or that he cannot go beyond the common range of nature's laws, in manifesting his paternal character to his creatures.

It is by no means impossible, that Abraham had been previously disposed to listen to the monitions of conscience, and to seek instruction from the dimly written page which nature spread before him. It can hardly be doubted, that wherever there is a willing mind to be

taught of God and led in the way of truth, though in the most ignorant idolater, the Divine Spirit will communicate more or less of instruction.

“To prayer, repentance, and obedience due,  
Though but endeavoured with sincere intent,  
Mine ear shall not be slow, mine eye not shut.  
And I will place within them as a guide  
My umpire Conscience, whom if they will hear,  
Light after light well used they shall attain,  
And to the end persisting safe arrive.”

The unwillingness of men to be taught of God, their opposition of heart to the nature of his instruction, is the only reason why even the heathen remain in their wretched delusions. Would they but open their ears, they might hear the voice of God speaking to them from the objects of heaven and earth. And though that voice is comparatively feeble and indistinct; yet if carefully listened to and its monitions obeyed, clearer communications would be afforded. “Day unto day uttereth speech and night unto night sheweth knowledge;” and the most ignorant pagan is without excuse, if he

dies destitute of all available knowledge of his Maker and his Maker's will.

There is a tradition among the Jews, that, one night, as Abraham was watching the stars, and observing how they sunk one after another from his view, the idea suddenly flashed upon his mind, that there was a God, greater and more glorious than any of those bright orbs which rolled above him. The sun had gone down, and star after star was fast disappearing. None of these luminaries, he concluded, could be God. "There must be a Being, then," he exclaimed, "whose brightness never fades—a Being above all that we see and know, who has spread out these heavens and ordered all their countless host." If there be any truth in this,—(and though most will pronounce it a fiction, there is nothing in it very incredible,—) Abraham may have been in some measure prepared by such meditations for the clearer discoveries which were afterwards made to him. God is always ready to manifest himself to those who sincerely seek the teachings of his Spirit. The young especially, when their

hearts are tender and unschooled in the ways of vice and folly, have great reason to be encouraged to seek the God of Abraham,—to put themselves in the way of his visitations,—and to expect the aid of his Spirit, if there be but an earnest desire to receive it. “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near.”

There is another tradition, and Josephus has given it a place in his history, that Abraham, having renounced idolatry, and labouring to convert his Chaldean neighbours to his own simple faith, incurred their displeasure; and was so severely persecuted by them, that he was obliged to flee from the country. Some say he was even thrown into a fiery furnace, from which he was miraculously delivered. This, very obviously, would account for his removal to Canaan. The story, however, has little of the air of probability, and scarcely deserves a place in sober history. We can believe that the three friends of Daniel were preserved alive in the fiery furnace of Nebuchadnezzar, because the pen of inspiration has

recorded the fact. But inspiration is silent concerning any such occurrence in the case of Abraham ; and consequently, as it is in itself improbable, it is doubtless to be rejected. Yet it may be true, that he incurred the hostility and hatred of his countrymen by renouncing their religion, and by efforts to convert them also. But, however this may have been, we are not to question the fact that he was called in a miraculous manner to leave the land of his nativity. For wise and weighty reasons, God had selected him, rather than any other individual, from among men, and manifested himself to him as he had not to the world, that through him he might preserve the knowledge of his own name and character on the earth.

Abraham yielded at once to the divine command. No sooner did the Almighty speak, than he listened ; no sooner was the communication given, than he believed. There seems to have been no hesitation,—no distrustful questioning, no balancing of the mind in sinful suspense. The uncertainty of the journey,—

for he was called to go forth not knowing whither,\*—might naturally have induced reluctance ; and how much is there in the human heart ready, on every such occasion, to awaken fear and distrust ! But he had an inward conviction which nothing could shake, that He who had appeared to him was worthy of all confidence,—that He could not deceive and would never forsake him ; and on that conviction he forthwith proceeded to act. He instantly followed the Divine direction, not doubting for a moment the issue. There was a power accompanying the testimony,—the manifestation and word of God, which seized and held, as it were, his whole mind. He had no desire to obtain further evidence of the reality and truth of that testimony ;—he *felt* its reality and truth, as he felt the truth of his own being ; and the one as little needed the aid of demonstration as the other. He therefore submitted himself without delay. The language of his heart was,—“ It is God who calleth me ; there

\* Heb. xi. 8.

is a divine energy in that voice ; and who am I that I should refuse ?" Gently as an obedient child, he yielded to his Heavenly Father's authority ; committed all his being and interests to his hand ; and from that hour was accounted a child of God.

Here we have a beautiful illustration of the nature and operation of genuine faith. It is a belief of the divine testimony—not merely an assent of the understanding—but a cordial submission of the heart. A mere assent of the understanding would not have led Abraham forth from his native land. Nor will a mere assent of the understanding to the truth of the Gospel rescue a sinner from the death which awaits him. It will never purify nor elevate the affections ; it will never prompt to active self-denying obedience. Abraham's faith did both. His whole life shows that his heart was fixed on God ; and prompt obedience was always a striking feature in his character. There was a vitality and power in his faith, which do not belong to a cold act of the understanding. It possessed a warmth which pene-

trated and quickened every faculty of the soul ; and an energy which touched the springs of spiritual life.

Such a faith, such in nature and such in operation, must be our's, or we can never be numbered among the spiritual children of Abraham, the Father of the Faithful. Let us then apply the test : are we ready, like him, to obey the divine voice, even when it calls us to a life of self-denying duty ? Do the facts set forth in the Gospel of Jesus Christ seize and hold our whole minds in firm belief and grateful wonder ? And do we yield ourselves up to the call of God as addressed to us by his Son, willing to forsake father and mother, and houses and lands, to part with life's best comforts and even life itself for his sake ? If this be our disposition and this our deed, "then are we Abraham's seed, and heirs, according to the promise."

This good man, however, undoubtedly appeared to others as a rash and reckless adventurer. He was setting out on a journey to a distant place of abode ; but whither he was

going and where he would finally pitch his tent, he could not explain to others, because he was ignorant himself. He had entrusted all to the guidance of an unseen hand ; but they who did not acknowledge that hand, would of course deride such confidence as presumption. An unbelieving world will always find matter enough for wonder and ridicule, in the conduct of those who rely more on the word of God than the suggestions of expediency or even the dictates of short sighted reason.

But how was it that any of the relations of Abraham were willing to accompany him on so wild an adventure ? Is it not reasonable to suppose, that, having himself become a worshipper of the true God, he laboured faithfully to convince his friends of the folly of idolatry, and to win them to a purer faith ? May we not imagine him seated by the side of his father, at his tent-door or under some spreading tree, with a little group of listeners around him, endeavouring, with all the eloquence of faith and affection, to recommend to them the religion which he had embraced and the God

in whom he trusted ? We can hardly doubt that he would act the part of a faithful missionary, a preacher of righteousness ; and thus perhaps he persuaded his father and nephew, together with Sarah to become the companions of his journey. He had in his heart the active principles of religion ; and those principles would not suffer him to rest without some suitable efforts to impart them to others. Such is evermore the nature of true piety. And what is more pleasing than to behold a son, in the midst of an irreligious family, kindly and affectionately recommending religion to those who are strangers to its influence ; employing not the power of the tongue merely, but of gentleness, patience, and smiling affection ; the eloquence of a life lovely with all the graces of piety, to lead them also into the paths of wisdom, which are pleasantness and peace. Many a son and many a daughter has thus been the means of converting ungodly parents and brothers and sisters ; when, perhaps, but for their persevering exertions, all the more formal appliances of the Gospel would have proved

unavailing. Many a heart which had resisted the terrors of Sinai's thunder and the voice of bleeding love from the cross, has melted under the influence of a daughter's piety and prayer. What a delightful additional tie of endearment is then formed between parents and children—a tie which death cannot sunder, and which eternity will but strengthen.

By some such influence as has been now described, it is not unreasonable to suppose that Abraham prevailed on his father and the others of the company, to leave a land of idolatry, and go with him to the unknown region whither the God of heaven should lead them. Some little preparation remained to be made for the long journey; a few parting words were to be spoken;—and then they were on their way towards the setting sun.

We see them now leisurely moving forward, driving their flocks and herds before them,—for they are shepherds,—and stopping here and there to spend a season, wherever they chance to find good pasturage or a plentiful supply of water. After a considerable lapse of

time, they arrive at Haran ; and although, according to the divine direction, they were not to take up a permanent position till they should reach the land of Canaan, yet they remained here till the death of Terah. Perhaps the old man had sunk under infirmity and was unable to proceed. This is altogether a rational supposition. We may then contemplate the filial affection and pious fidelity of Abraham, suspending his journey and devoting himself, with undivided care, to the comfort of his father, as he descended to the grave. Alone in the wilderness, far remote perhaps from the dwellings of men,\* the gloom of solitude must have deepened the sadness of his heart, as he watched the progress of decay in his only surviving parent,

\* There is indeed no evidence that this was altogether an uninhabited region. Haran was certainly a very ancient settlement, and might have had a few inhabitants before Abraham's residence there. The circumstance, however, of its being named, as it manifestly was, after Abraham's eldest brother, is an indication that it had at least no name before this period.

and thought of leaving his remains in the dust of a strange land. Many an anxious day passed with painful alternations of hope and fear, as life and death were struggling for the mastery, till the great Conqueror gained the ascendant, and impressed his fatal seal upon the pale and haggard brow of his victim. With what tenderness must the son have bent over the dying father, whom he had instructed, perhaps effectually, in the knowledge of the Most High, soothing his sufferings and pointing him to that “better country,” the end of the pious wanderer’s journey, the Pilgrim’s happy home !

## CHAPTER II.

### ABRAHAM'S JOURNEY FROM HARAN TO BETHEL.

“ Then kneeling down, to *Heaven's Eternal King*,  
The saint, the father, and the husband prays ;  
Hope ‘ springs exulting on triumphant wing,’  
That thus they all shall meet in future days :  
There ever bask in uncreated rays,  
No more to sigh, or shed the bitter tear,  
Together hymning the Creator's praise,  
In such society, yet still more dear ;  
While circling time moves round in an eternal sphere.”

*Burns.*

ABRAHAM is supposed to have remained in Haran about five years. After his father's death, as we are informed by Stephen,\* he removed thence and pursued his journey to the promised land. Some learned men, however, contend, agreeably to the opinion of certain Jewish writers, that Terah did not die before the departure of his son ; and that Stephen meant nothing more by his death, than apostacy

\* *Acts vii. 4.*

to idolatry, of which they say he was guilty. This opinion is adopted to obviate a chronological difficulty, which is supposed to exist in the scriptural account. But as this difficulty can be removed more satisfactorily on other grounds, it is no doubt wiser and safer to understand the statement of Stephen, as literally true.

Haran, or Charræ,—(the name which the place at present bears is Harran)—was a city in Mesopotamia, situated at the distance of between four and five hundred miles from Jerusalem; and in a direction a little east of north. It doubtless took its name from the eldest son of Terah. This was the place to which Jacob, in accordance with Rebekah's directions, fled from the anger of Esau, about one hundred and fifty years after Abraham's sojourn there; and here also, in the family of Laban his uncle, he found Rachel and Leah, who became his wives. Whatever the city may have been in ancient times, it is now a small, insignificant place, in a flat, sandy plain, the abode of only a few wandering

Arabs. It derives its only distinction from the delicious water with which it abounds.

In all probability those waters possessed the same excellence in the time of Abraham, as at present ; and it may have been from this circumstance, that he protracted his sojourn for five years in Haran. Possibly also, as we know that great changes in the character of the soil have taken place extensively in the East, those sandy plains may have been at that distant day, covered with luxuriant vegetation, peculiarly inviting to a wandering shepherd. May we not then hazard the conjecture, that Abraham, charmed with the rich pasturage and sweet waters of the region, forgot for a while the original design of his journey, or was willing to believe that a country so admirably adapted to his wants, was the country to which God had called him ? The circumstances of his father's sickness may have detained him a while ; but hardly, one would imagine, for so long a period as five years. Perhaps he fondly clung to the spot where his father's ashes rested, and was unwilling to leave it. Easy it

is for the best of men to be so far influenced by worldly attachments and worldly interests, as to be greatly hindered in their spiritual course. Though travelling towards Zion with their hearts mainly tending in that direction, how often do they linger in some delightful, enchanting vale, to drink of the waters of earth and indulge in its delusive pleasures ! Meanwhile, perhaps, they forget for a season, their high destination, and imagine, or seem to imagine, that they have found their rest. The world is not all a wilderness. If it were, the pilgrim, bound to a better country, would pass through it with hasty and unremitting steps, shaking off the dust of his feet as he hastened on, and pressing toward his final home. But he falls here and there upon a green and sunny spot, with its sparkling fountains and delicious fruits. And though it may often prove to have been little better than a vain show, still the delusion enchains him, and he makes no progress in his upward way. “ Love not the world neither the things that are in the world.” “ Let us lay aside every weight and the sin

which doth most easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race set before us."

It is by no means impossible, however, that Abraham had other and better motives for remaining so long in Haran. If that region was then peopled, as it is by no means improbable, —in the character of a missionary he might have been well employed for a much longer time in proclaiming the knowledge of God. With a zeal quickened to greater intensity by the scenes he had witnessed at the bed-side of his dying father, he may have resolved to suspend his journey, till he had made known the religion which he had found so full of consolation, to all the inhabitants of the country.

It is uncertain whether God appeared to Abraham in Haran, or whether he resumed his journey without further instructions from above. At all events, we see him again pursuing his way towards Canaan, greatly increased in his possessions. God had signally prospered him ever since the day that he yielded to his voice. "Them that honour me I will

honour." The wealth of those times consisted chiefly in flocks and herds. Servants are also sometimes mentioned as constituting in part the substance or wealth of an individual.

"And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all the substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran: and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan. And into the land of Canaan they came." Gen. xii. 5.

Abraham was now seventy-five years of age —an age at which we should look for much imbecility and increasing decay. But it is unnecessary to remark that the measures of age were then widely different from those to which we are accustomed. And it is an interesting inquiry now beginning to excite considerable attention among scientific men, whether the great age to which the patriarchs attained may not have been owing to natural causes; and whether, by imitating them in piety of heart, in simplicity of life, and temperance in all things, men might not, after a few generations, regain the same longevity. At

seventy-five, Abraham was just in the vigour of manhood,—in the full maturity of his frame and faculties. A hundred years were yet before him—years to be enriched with much of the divine goodness, though often to be darkened with peculiar trials.

In passing on toward Canaan, Abraham travelled through Sichem, now called Naplouse, the place where Joseph was afterward buried, and where our Saviour met the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well. It is still a considerable city, and is represented by Dr. Clarke as one of the finest spots in Palestine. He says—“As the traveller descends towards it from the hills, it appears luxuriantly embosomed in the most delightful and fragrant bowers, half concealed by rich gardens, and by stately trees collected into groves, all around the bold and beautiful valley where it stands. . . . The traveller directing his footsteps towards its ancient sepulchres, as everlasting as the rocks wherein they are hewn, is permitted on the authority of sacred and indelible record, to contemplate the spot where the remains of

Joseph, of Eleazar, and of Joshua, were severally deposited."

In the plain of Moreh, a little distance from Sichem, Abraham paused for a short time, and built an altar unto the Lord. " And there he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord." Here the Most High again appeared unto him, in the same manner doubtless as before he left Ur of the Chaldees, renewing the promise which he then made, and assuring him, that unto his seed he would give the land through which he was passing. Thence he removed to the vicinity of Bethel, where he built another altar, and where he probably had other communications from the Lord.

How striking is the example of this extraordinary man, and how full of instruction ! Does he pause, for a brief space on his journey ? It seems to be the first object of his care to make the necessary provision for the worship of God. An altar is erected for purposes, there is reason to believe, of public as well as of domestic worship. Abraham's numerous family indeed

would form a very considerable congregation ; and when strangers came in, as they would naturally do to witness and sometimes to participate in the solemnities of the sacrifice, it would possess all the essential elements of *public worship*.

May we not look upon Abraham's family, as at this time the only praying family in the world, excepting perhaps such as may have been converted through his instrumentality ? Of these, however, we have no record. Nahor appears to have been but partially imbued with the true spirit of religion ; as to Melchizedek, we know too little of his character to pronounce with certainty whether he formed an exception. At all events, there is reason to conclude, that no where else, as in this favoured circle of worshipers assembled around the altar of Abraham,—no where else so intelligently and devoutly was the God of heaven acknowledged and adored. This was comparatively the only spot of light amid the all-pervading darkness—a little solitary oasis in the universal desert. What a privilege to have belonged to that fami-

ly ! There peculiarly God's presence was found ; there peculiarly his blessing rested. Abraham's tent contained more of heaven than all the world besides : and in comparison with it,

“ Tents of ease and thrones of power ”

were but an image of restlessness and sorrow. Happy are they who dwell beneath the shadow of the altar ; who are connected with families where God is worshiped, and where lessons of divine instruction are communicated. Happy are those parents who imitate the patriarch's example, and happy those children who share in the heavenly influence of their instructions and prayers !

But alas, how many are favoured with all these advantages, who yet neither appreciate nor improve them ! How often do we see the youth who has always lived under the sound of prayer, the delicate and cherished daughter, who from her earliest years has been taught to kneel at the household altar, while the voice of earnest entreaty went up from the father's lips—turning away with proud indifference, and

choosing her portion amongst the thoughtless and profane ! She has virtually rejected her father and her mother's God. She has cast away the blessing which was put into her hand, and broken, as it were, from the golden girdle of the covenant. Pleasure may smile around her for a season ; but let her "remember the days of darkness, for they are many." She may forsake her father and her mother's God ; she may despise the best blessing they can bestow in life, and the richest legacy they can bequeath in death ; but let her not forget what God hath spoken,—"They that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed." "They that have hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, shall eat of the fruit of their own way and be filled with their own devices."

Still oftener will the young man, the son around whom the parents' love once threw the vow of promise, go out from the hallowed circle of Christian sympathies and instructions and intercessions, only to mingle with the giddy and float down the tide of sin, casting off fear and ripening for ruin. But although these sons and

daughters of piety and prayer may glide along for a season, in undisturbed security, they carry with them a dreadful responsibility. It can never be with them, as with those who have grown up in the darker places of life, where the voice of prayer is never heard. A father's fervent supplications, a mother's tender entreaties will follow them into every walk of sinful gaiety and every corner of secret vice, to enhance their guilt, to give a deeper dye to every sin in which they indulge, and to make more agonising at last the remorse of an accusing conscience. What can be more distressing, in the dark hour of adversity or on a dying bed, than the remembrance of prayers and instructions in early life, from the lips of parental love, disregarded and abused! How dreadful then the thought,—“I have hated instruction and despised reproof! I have set at naught the wisest counsels, and turned away, with scorn, from the most solemn warnings! I have converted into scorpion stings, those prayers which, as they went up to heaven, might have been treasured there as a fountain of life to my soul!”

Yet the history of the household altar is more frequently written in characters of mercy. On it burns a flame which spreads a cheering purifying light through the dwelling, though it be the abode of poverty and sorrow ; a light which often lives on long after they who kindled it have departed from the living, and brightens into piety and gladness along the path of future generations. Who can tell how closely the rich cloud which Abraham saw suspended full of blessings over his posterity, was connected with the prayers he offered at the altar in Moreh, in Bethel, and in Hebron ! And who will dare provoke the vengeance of him who will “pour out his fury on the families that call not on his name.”

But, as has been intimated, we have an example here for the maintenance of *public* as well as *private* devotion. The altar in Moreh and in Bethel, may be looked upon as the general gathering place of the devout ; there sacrifices were offered in behalf of all who came to seek the Lord ; and there the voice of the man of God was heard in fervent prayer, and doubt-

less also in earnest exhortation.\* The spot thus consecrated was a sort of temple, where not merely a single family, but large numbers might unite in religious worship.

Thus we see Abraham, at each stage of his journey, erecting altars for this two-fold purpose. Yet he was but a traveller. Few travellers, like him, make it the first object of their care, wherever they stop, to provide for the worship of their kind preserver. Let them be rebuked by the example of this ancient pilgrim. And how much more should they who have planted themselves down for life, take pains to plant there the institutions of religion ; to rear, not only for their own benefit but for the benefit of the community around them, an altar for the service of the most high ; and make provision for the offering thereon of the stated sacrifice.

\* The expression, “he called upon the name of the Lord,” Gen. 12: 8, imports, in the original, that he not only prayed but preached, joining exhortation and instruction to devotion.

## CHAPTER III.

### AN EXAMPLE OF HUMAN INFIRMITY.

“ Virtue has her relapses, conflicts, foes;  
And much forgiveness need her purest sons.”

IN the preceding chapters, we have seen Abraham departing from Chaldea, and after a long and circuitous pilgrimage, arriving in the land of Canaan. Ignorant himself both of the destination and of the way, his course seems to have been providentially directed. It was circuitous and slow, that he might have a better opportunity of making known extensively to the scattered population of the countries through which he passed, that religion of which he was the chief depository and the chosen channel to mankind. Thus he fulfilled the office of a travelling missionary, “visiting,” as one has said, “the main portions of the inhabited world.” How impressive a spectacle to the nations, this

goodly emir, this distinguished prince, with his extensive retinue, traversing the earth, not for war and conquest, but for purposes of religion and benevolence !” Doubtless this is the true idea of his character. Like a modern sheik or emir, he possessed great riches, (which were constantly increasing under the blessing of God,) held an exalted rank in personal dignity, and commanded universal respect ; and at the same time like an ambassador of the Most High, he rebuked the ignorance and errors of his age, and proclaimed, wherever he went, the doctrines of a purer faith.

Taking possession of not a particle of the land to which he emigrated, he was content to be “a stranger and a sojourner,” removing from one locality to another as his own circumstances, or the voice of his heavenly guide directed. In those days, little was known of the comforts and advantages of HOME. In fact, home is a word, the full meaning of which has never been understood, except where it has been revealed by the broad light of Christianity. No where else has its power to elevate and bless,

to refine the manners and expand the soul, to hold vice in restraint and give impulse to virtue, to heighten the joys of prosperity, and enliven the hours of sorrow, been fully developed. Its clustering blessings have been known only in union with the Christian religion. They were experienced neither in the tents of the godly patriarchs, nor in the palaces of the refined Greeks and Romans. And as for the present heathen world, the term, where it exists, denotes little more than the place where *man* exercises his individual tyranny, where *woman* toils in servitude, and where *children* grow up strangers to domestic endearments, ignorant, wretched, and vile. They, therefore, who are blessed with a happy **HOME**, where they may always flee from a troubled world, should remember that for *this* and for *all* their best enjoyments, they are indebted to the religion of Jesus Christ. O how does that religion, like the sun that continually scatters light over every orb of its system, while it carries them all with it in the journey of its own vast cycle, diffuse lustre and joyousness through every ordinary walk of life, making

time's wilderness blossom like the rose, while it fulfils its still worthier office of bearing its votaries onward through the glorious revelations of eternity !

A short time after the arrival of Abraham, the whole country of Canaan was visited with a famine. Famines were a very common evil in Palestine. Sometimes they were caused by locusts or other insects, which cut off vegetation and left the earth almost as desolate as if scathed with fire ; but more frequently they were occasioned by drought. To escape from this calamity, Abraham resolved on removing for a season to Egypt, a country where the soil, annually watered from the Nile, was not dependent, like Palestine, on periodical rains. It is now that we discover the first dark spot on the hitherto bright surface of his moral history. The circumstances are thus related by the faithful biographer :

“ And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon : therefore it shall

come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive. Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee." Gen. 12: 11 —13.

We will in the first place, attend to these circumstances a little more minutely, and secondly, attend to the moral aspect of Abraham's conduct.

I. The circumstances of his conduct deserve attention. Abraham was about to enter the dominions, perhaps the capital city, of one of the greatest monarchs of the time. He was himself a plain man, unschooled in the arts of luxurious vice; but, in some way or other, he was led to apprehend danger from his visit to Egypt; he might have heard of the licentiousness of Pharaoh; and it was well that he put himself on his guard. Sarai was beautiful. Her charms, he feared, would prove the ruin of them both. There was reason in this; for such have often been the consequences of beauty without dis-

cretion, and sometimes even in despite of it. Abraham's solicitude, therefore, is indicative of wisdom, and deserves commendation. To enter such a place as the Egyptian capital required circumspection, especially under his peculiar circumstances. And the event proved that his fears were far from groundless. The king was captivated with the beautiful stranger. His courtiers had seen her, and had given such glowing representations of her beauty, that Pharaoh resolved to give her a place among the favourite ladies of his court. She was accordingly taken to his palace. Alas for Abraham ! Disgrace and the ruin of his domestic peace seemed inevitable. But God remembered him at this crisis, and he was mercifully preserved from the calamity which he feared.

But, though he had great occasion for solicitude, the means to which he resorted for security, were in the highest degree reprehensible. According to an agreement which, it would appear from a subsequent part of the history,\* they

\*Gen. 20: 13.

had entered into soon after leaving Chaldea, Sarai was to pass as the sister of her husband. In anticipation of danger, they had formed this plan prospectively as their best defence. And now when danger, as they supposed, actually threatened, they agreed, at Abraham's suggestion, that it be put in execution. It accordingly was ; and the consequences were such as might have been foreseen. Sarai being universally regarded as an unmarried woman, and the sister of a wealthy prince, attracted general admiration ; and it is no wonder that, under these circumstances, the king should have sought to place her in his harem. But, as has been intimated, God interposed in season to prevent the consummation of Pharaoh's design ; and by severe visitations of disease, convinced the king that he had done wrong in taking the beautiful stranger to his palace, and led him to suspect that she was the wife of Abraham. He immediately restored her to her husband, and with a reproof richly merited, sent him away with all his possessions.

How remarkable the care of God over his

erring servant ! It might have been expected that he would, at such a conjunction, leave him to his own devices. He had resorted to a most questionable expedient of human policy to secure his safety ; it would have been just to abandon him for a season to its legitimate operation. But he who is of great long-suffering, was not strict to mark his transgression. He not only rescued Sarai, but withheld the king from those impulses of anger which would naturally have been excited by such an imposition. “ The stranger has deceived me, and severely shall he suffer for it ! He has brought upon me these plagues, under which I and all my household have been wasting in torture, ever since Sarai came under my roof. Guards, have him forth instantly from the city and see that he is punished according to his deserts ! ” Such language might have been looked for from the injured and indignant monarch. But instead of this, he speaks only in gentle tones ; his rebuke is mild and temperate : “ What is this that thou hast done unto me ? ” and he takes leave of him as of one who he knew was under the special guardianship of an Almighty Providence.

This we must regard as a striking example of the silent, yet certain protection which God extends over his children. The king's heart was in his hand, and he turned it at his pleasure. We see not that hand moving on the monarch's heart, nor can we tell in what manner it acts in accomplishing the end designed ; but it is there stilling the rising passions and preventing the outbreak of violence. Thus the "Lord preserveth the souls of his saints, and delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked." "Though they fall, they shall not be utterly cast down." Even when they wander from him, he will gently lead them back, as a father the children of his love.

II. In the second place, we were to consider Abraham's conduct in this matter, in its moral aspect. It was indeed true, that Sarai was his sister, being the daughter of his father, though not of his mother ; and, therefore, it may be pleaded that the offence was not a direct and absolute *lie*. Yet it was an expedient to deceive ; it was intended to produce a false impression, and consequently had all the force

and effect of a lie in its naked form. As such it must, accordingly, be considered ; for it is not so much the *form* as the *design* and *effect* of an act that gives it its character. Deception, intentional deception, is the very essence of falsehood ; and where this exists, it matters little what shape the language may be made to assume, or whether language or some other mode of expression be employed.

It is moreover an aggravation of Abraham's offence, that he should have had recourse to such a means of safety, when he knew that the God of heaven stood pledged as his protector. "I will bless thee, and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing : and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee." What more could he desire ? How astonishing that with an assurance of the divine blessing, he should deem it necessary to shelter himself from danger under the thin and flimsy cover of equivocation ! especially after such an exhibition of faith as we see in him hitherto. "Lord, what is man ?"

And yet there is another aggravating circum-

stance, which renders the case still more inexcusable. No danger had as yet appeared. The plan was devised and agreed on in the utmost coolness of deliberation. On sudden emergencies, when the instant pressure of calamity startles the fancy and confounds the reason, it is not wonderful that good men should commit acts which their sober judgment would condemn. But to agree on such an act beforehand, when the sky is clear and scarcely a cloud of threatening evil is seen, would seem to argue a state of mind altogether inconsistent with a pious trust in God. Yet Abraham's piety is beyond suspicion ; and we must set his conduct in this as in some other instances hereafter to be noticed, to the account of human frailty. The best may err ; and as Fuller sagaciously remarks, they often err most egregiously in respect to those very things in which their greatest excellencies consist. Abraham was distinguished for his confidence in God ; his principal transgressions indicate distrust in him. It would seem as if good men were most frequently assaulted and led into sin, at the strongest

points of their character. Well might the psalmist say, “I have seen an end of all perfection ; but thy commandment is exceeding broad.” Let such examples teach us humility and candour—humility in estimating our own virtues, and candour in judging the faults of others.

Let not the example of this distinguished servant of God, however, throw a softening veil over the practice of deception. What crime can be mentioned, that might not plead the sanction both of great and of pious names? All deception is to be condemned and avoided. It is destructive of that mutual confidence, without which there can be no happy and prosperous intercourse among men. If one resorts to its arts, another may do the same ; and what would the issue be but universal disorder? Therefore “Let every one speak the truth with his neighbour.” Even in those cases where it appears most necessary, as a means and the only means of escaping sudden danger, it can only be regarded as arising from distrust of the common providence of God. If your only defence is a lie, better tell the truth and suffer.

But deception is not only practised as a sort of defence from various sorts of danger; but frequently to enliven and adorn the intercourse of polite society. How essential is it often to the refined elegancies of conversation! It constitutes the very soul of flattery; and many of the delicate compliments which are so artfully administered on the one hand, and so eagerly drunk in on the other, are composed of nothing else. How dull would that social circle often be, in which nothing was allowed to be spoken, that would not bear the rigid test of truth! Is it said—no one is deceived by such refined forms of falsehood? Why then employ them? It surely argues a peculiarly vain and empty mind to be pleased with what is false, when its falsity is understood; to be delighted with forms of deceit which have nothing but their emptiness to recommend them.

It is dangerous to indulge in such practices as these to any degree or for any purpose. The sacredness of truth being once violated, the regard which was felt for it is lost, or, at least, greatly diminished. Deceit, at first practised

by one class, only in pressing emergencies, and by another, as a mere embellishment of discourse, comes at length to be practised unconsciously till it becomes a fixed and pernicious habit. Thus one's character for veracity is lost ; he is suspected of lying even when he speaks the truth ; and every thing he utters is subjected to a liberal discount.

This sin is classed by the sacred writers, among the most heinous and abominable crimes. It is embraced in the prohibition of the ninth commandment. It is often directly forbidden in the word of God. “Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips that they speak no guile.” “Ye shall not lie one to another.” The liar is peculiarly an abhorrence to the divine mind. “Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord.” And of liars it is said, “They shall have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.”

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE SEPARATION: AN EXAMPLE OF DISINTEREST. EDNESS.

The selfish soul, insatiate like the sea,  
Is never full ; it would engross the wealth  
Of all the world, and murmur still for more—  
Wretched alike in affluence and want.  
But generous Virtue, almoner of heaven,  
Is happy only when dispensing good ;  
Oblivious of itself, its highest bliss  
It finds—not seeks—in making others blest.

*Anon.*

HAVING been dismissed by the Egyptian king in the manner just described, Abraham returned to the place of his former sojourn, among the hills of Bethel. It may not be improper to introduce here a statement of Josephus, which, though it may be deserving of little credit, sets the character of Abraham in a most interesting light. He relates that the patriarch, when in Egypt, laboured diligently, by reasoning with the pagan priests, to convince them of their folly in worshiping false gods ; that he held conferences with the people for the purpose of

confuting their absurd arguments ; and sought with the utmost assiduity to convert them to his own purer and more rational religion. This account, in itself, is by no means improbable ; and if true, it affords a beautiful illustration of the zeal of this extraordinary man in the fulfilment of his office as a missionary. What follows is of far more doubtful character. He states that Abraham taught the Egyptians arithmetic and astronomy, sciences first cultivated in Chaldea, the land of the patriarch's birth and education, and unknown in Egypt as Josephus would persuade us, till introduced there by this Chaldean stranger. Thus, if we may believe the historian, he approved himself in Egypt on this occasion, more as a man of learning than as a man of truth.

Josephus, no doubt, was very willing to exalt the character of his great national progenitor, in those traits which would gain the admiration of a pagan community. He might very naturally have been solicitous to commend him to the respect of the high-minded Romans, who cared little for the moral virtues unless they

were associated with heroism or philosophy. Hence, apparently, he was tempted, by stepping beyond the lines of truth, to add to the patriarch's other merits, the praise of being the father of Egyptian learning. But it is unnecessary to claim for him any such adventitious distinction. The honour which he received from God, as the Father of the Faithful, is infinitely greater than all earthly praise. As a man of distinguished virtue, the fragrance of his name is still preserved in the traditions of most of the Asiatic nations ; whose early fore-fathers may have known his character and perhaps heard his instructive voice in his extensive missionary journeys.

Soon after Abraham's departure from Egypt, we find him worshiping again at the altar which he had reared some years before, in Bethel. There he renewed the sacrifice, with his heart lifted up to God in devout gratitude for his past mercies, and with his eye looking down through coming ages, to the predicted Messiah, the great appointed sacrifice for the sins of the world. We are expressly informed

by our Saviour himself, that he had a joyful foresight of his coming ; that “ he saw his day and was glad.” And doubtless, while he witnessed the slain lamb consuming on the altar, he had a believing and an enrapturing view of Him, who was to be offered as a lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and whose blood alone could cleanse from all sin. It was thus the ancient saints found comfort in the otherwise cruel and unmeaning rites of their divinely-instituted worship. The types quickened their faith to a livelier apprehension of the antitype ; the shadows guided them in their search for the substance. And thus Christ, the atoning Saviour, has ever been the centre of the homage which the believing world has offered. Every believing eye has been turned to **HIM** from all quarters of the earth and all periods of time. And to all, he has ever spoken the same encouraging language—“ I am the way, the truth, and the life.” “ Believe and thou shalt be saved.”

An event now occurs which places Abraham before us in a new attitude. Hitherto, we have

seen him acting always in a manner, it is true, which shows that he was not unreasonably devoted to his own selfish interests ; but now his disinterested generosity blazes forth with a lustre, which cannot fail to excite the highest admiration. The incident referred to is thus related by the inspired historian :

“ And Lot also which went with Abram had flocks and herds and tents. And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together : for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram’s cattle and the herdmen of Lot’s cattle. And the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land. And Abram said unto Lot, let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen ; for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before thee ? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me : If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right : or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.” Gen. xiii. 5—9.

Strife will sometimes arise between those who cherish towards each other the most friendly sentiments. If there be in the heart any thing inflammable, there is always enough in the world to furnish a spark for its ignition. A strife arose between Abraham and his nephew Lot, or rather between the keepers of their flocks and herds, which threatened to destroy the peace of the family. We will contemplate, first, the occasion of the strife; secondly, the proposition made by Abraham for its suppression; and thirdly, the spirit which that proposition indicated.

I. What was the occasion of the strife? The uncle and nephew appear to have had separate interests. Each had his own flocks and herds; and each his own herdsmen. Their property was not held in common, but in shares. Such a division of it could hardly have happened, (unless it had existed from the first,) except for the gratification of Lot. May we not suppose that he was unduly anxious to have his property distinct from his uncle's, from a pride of wealth?—a passion too common in the world,

and frequently operating as the bane of social harmony. Possibly we may detect here what is seen afterwards to be his ruling passion—an excessive desire of riches. In the division of property, however, there was nothing intrinsically wrong; and it may have been on the whole a wise expedient. There would unquestionably be more quarreling and contention in the world, if each cluster of families should throw their property into common stock, than there is at present. As human nature is, there must necessarily for the public welfare be, to some extent, separate interests and separate objects of pursuit, though it often operates to the production of incidental evils.

Both Abraham and Lot had grown rich in flocks and herds; and a considerable extent of country was needed for their support. The hills of Bethel were white with the multitude of sheep, and the cattle wandered restlessly about in search of pasturage in the plains. The Canaanite and Perizzite, who had some time before taken possession of the country, probably gave them serious inconvenience, pre-occu-

pying the best portion of the land, or preventing their free use of those parts where they dwelt. Thus straitened, the herdsmen of each party, interested for their respective masters, began to contend with each other. Each strove to get some advantage of his competitor; and since there was not enough for all, to secure as much as possible for the benefit of the party to which he belonged. The trouble became at length so serious, that it demanded immediate attention. Lot's own mind, it may be suspected, becoming in some measure dissatisfied and soured; and Abraham, whose keen eye discovered the uneasiness of his nephew, resolved, if possible, to crush the evil in the bud.

How much of the bickering and contention which exist in the world, proceeds from an excessive love of wealth! Nothing more frequently than this disturbs the peace of families and breaks out in a flame of lasting hatred between those who were once fast friends. How many breaches of friendship, how many quarrels between brethren, how many vexatious law suits, how many permanently embittered

tempers, have sprung from this “root of all evil!” In moderate desires alone, there is safety and happiness. Most true is the saying of the wise man,—“He that is greedy of gain, troubleth his own house.” And again,—“In the revenues of the wicked there is trouble.” We shall have occasion to revert to this subject again, in a subsequent chapter, where a melancholy illustration will be presented of the evils which flowed from the disposition of Lot as here exhibited. Let us consider now the proposition made by Abraham to remove the difficulty they were suffering.

II. When it becomes a settled fact, that harmony can no longer exist between families or individuals, separation, however painful, is the only remedy. When a diseased member cannot be healed, it must be amputated; else the whole body will suffer, perhaps perish, from its infection. Yet the process is most agonizing. Doubtless it was so to Abraham. His nephew had been his constant companion from the time of their removal from Chaldea. They had dwelt together hitherto in intimate and endear-

ing friendship. But the fondest affections must be sacrificed for the sake of peace. Solitude is better than society, when society can be had only at the price of domestic tranquillity. Few evils are more to be deprecated than strife between friends ; and every thing but principle must be hazarded for its suppression. With such sentiments as these, Abraham takes his nephew to the summit of one of the hills of Bethel. "We are brethren," said he, "and contention must have no place between us." O that this consideration were sufficient to quench the rising flame ! But he knew, as has a thousand times since been proved in the world, that none are so bitter as the quarrels of brethren. Nothing could be relied on but a complete separation. Having arrived at a spot where an extensive view was afforded of the surrounding country, the patriarch, taking his nephew by the left hand, and pointing with the other to the rich valley of the Jordan which lay at their feet stretching far away toward the south, "See," said he, "Is not the whole land before thee ? Separate thyself, I pray thee,

from me. If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right ; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.” Lot, in the eagerness of selfish desire, looked forth upon that well watered and fertile valley ; he saw already there the promise of abundant wealth ; dazzling images of future greatness danced before his mind ; and his choice was fixed without delay. It is by no means certain, that Lot, with all his apparent avarice, was not a man of piety. We are unwilling to believe that he should have lived so long under the influence of the godly Abraham, without imbibing something of his spirit. True indeed it is, that religion is not to be communicated by contact. But in a well-ordered family, where God is regularly worshiped, and piety is the presiding and all-pervading principle, we have a right to expect that the inmates will feel its power, and generally submit their hearts to its control. That this was true of Lot seems not altogether improbable, especially when we consider the import of the epithets applied to

him by Peter,\* who calls him a “just,” a “righteous,” and in immediate connexion, by implication, a “godly” man. But what an inconsistency! Strange union of contrary elements—the love of God and the love of the world! Yet such a paradox is exhibited, more or less by every believer in the present imperfect state—

“An heir of heaven, and walking thitherward ;  
Yet casting back a covetous eye on earth ;  
Emblem of strength and weakness ; loving now,  
And now abhorring sin ;  
A man willing to do, and doing not ;  
Doing, and willing not ; embracing what  
He hates, what most he loves abandoning.”

Covetousness—an inordinate desire of worldly good, of wealth, power, or distinction, especially of wealth, is, in these days, the easily besetting sin of Christians. Their thirst for gain appears often much stronger than for godliness ; and like Lot, they are generally ready to pitch their tent wherever Mammon promises them the

\* 2 Peter ii. 7, 8.

richest harvests, though at the sacrifice of infinitely more valuable advantages. He did not inquire, or if he was aware of the fact, he did not stop to consider, what was the character of the inhabitants of the plain ; nor what fatal hazard to himself and his family he might incur by taking up his residence among them. These considerations should have weighed far more in his mind, than the fairest prospect of worldly wealth or greatness ; for “what is a man profited if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul.” Reflections like these seem not to have entered his mind in choosing his place of settlement. The plain of the Jordan was the only paradise to him, though the men who dwelt there “were wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly.” The consequences, as we shall see hereafter, were most disastrous : his riches were consumed ; his wife struck dead ; and he left to wander an exile in the earth.

III. We are now to contemplate the temper of mind which was exhibited in Abraham’s conduct on this occasion. He was the elder,

and in a certain sense the guardian of Lot. The latter had no claim upon him for any special favour in the settlement of this difficulty. If therefore any advantage was granted him, it was a pure gratuity, and indicative of a most generous spirit. But, in the first place, we cannot but bestow a momentary notice on the pacific temper of the patriarch. He could not bear to live amid turmoil and contention. Peace was the atmosphere in which his soul delighted. He felt the force of the sentiments so beautifully expressed many hundred years afterwards by the Psalmist—"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in amity. It is as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore." Whatever is virtuous in the human heart, every principle and feeling of heavenly origin, must necessarily suffer amid the storms of strife and the murkiness of discontent. As the stone cast into the calm lake, in whose unruffled surface was reflected every object upon the bank and every

passing cloud above it, disturbs the clear waters and confounds every beautiful image reflected there; so do the impulses of passion create a turmoil in the breast and destroy every divine impression that had been formed in the soul.

There are four steps pointed out by the devout Thomas à Kempis, for securing peace: 1. "Constantly endeavour to do the will of another, rather than thy own: 2. Constantly choose rather to want less, than to have more: 3. Constantly choose the lowest place, and to be humble to all: and 4. Constantly desire and pray, that the will of God may be accomplished in thee, and concerning thee." "He that doeth this," he adds, "enters into the region of rest and peace." These are maxims of distinguished wisdom. Let them be pondered and practised, and contention shall flee away and be known no more. When, O when shall the golden period come, when strife shall disappear from the tabernacles of Zion; when wranglings and wordy war with bitterness of heart, shall no more disturb the intercourse of Christians; when all who bear the

name of the meek and lowly Jesus, shall imbibe his spirit and love one another with a pure heart—servently ! Then may we expect the sword of national warfare to be sheathed for ever ; and battles and bloodshed will exist only in the history of the past. “Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God.”

Again : we are to contemplate Abraham’s generosity, as displayed in the incident related. See him standing on that high eminence overlooking the course of the Jordan ; mark his manly dignity of mein ; his composed countenance ; his elevated, benevolent brow ; his eye beaming with benignity and kindness ; and observe how calm, and at the same time, how full of affection are the tones of his voice. He looks and speaks as one elevated above the region of earth’s low cares and disquietudes. He was very rich, we are told, “in cattle, in silver, and in gold.” But, unlike the common mass of men, he did not idolize his wealth, nor eagerly grasp at more in proportion as his possessions increased. “Behold,” (this is the pur-

port of his language to his companion) “ behold this wide and goodly land, on the one side broken into craggy hills and deep valleys, and, on the other, spreading out in a well watered and fruitful plain. I am thine elder, and might justly claim the right of choosing for myself whatever part of the land I please ; —but no : I value peace infinitely more than any worldly advantage. Rather than there should be strife between us—choose for thyself a portion wherever thou wilt. Take the precedence ; I freely yield it, that the voice of dissension may no more be heard in our tents.” Admirable condescension, how rare in this selfish world ! The elder submits to the younger, the superior to the inferior, waiving the rights of birth and age and divine appointment, to quell the rising spirit of discontent, and restore the broken empire of peace. Ah, how much domestic trouble, how much misery in society, how much expenditure of blood and treasure in national conflicts, might thus have been prevented ! It requires only a little humility. But the selfish heart revolts from such a sacrifice

of its independence. When offence has been given and a quarrel has ensued, Pride exclaims, “I cannot waive my rights for the sake of reconciliation. I am not the offender: the other party did the wrong. Let therefore the other party make reparation, at least confess the wrong, and take the first measures for a restoration of harmony.” And so Pride folds himself up in his dignity, and the quarrel rages undiminished. But Pride is blind. It is magnanimous to condescend and forgive. Let the film be removed from his eye, let him be pointed to the noble-hearted patriarch on the summit of Bethel, who never did himself more honour than when receding from his rightful prerogatives. Thus let Pride be shamed into a meek yet noble condescension. One spark of Abraham’s magnanimous generosity would explode this false show of independence, and induce a temper which would hush half the tempests of the moral world.

We are assured by unerring authority, that “the liberal soul shall be made fat;” and the history of the benevolent proves it to be true.

Abraham lost nothing by his generosity. He doubtless returned with peculiar and heart-felt satisfaction, to his tent amid the rough hills of Canaan, which if less luxuriantly fertile than the vale of the Jordan, were consecrated by the visitations of Jehovah. But the quiet satisfaction of an approving conscience was not his only reward. He was divinely directed, from some lofty eminence, to look abroad northward and southward, and eastward and westward. The whole extent of country which thus came within the scope of his survey, he was assured by a voice from heaven, should be given to him and his seed, for a perpetual possession. He had, therefore, no occasion to regret his liberality to Lot. If he gave him the choice of the best part, he secured to himself a grant of the whole from the Lord. So shall it ever be with the truly benevolent. For every measure of their charity, they shall receive seven fold into their own bosoms from the hand of God. And should not the bond be fully discharged in the present world, the arrears, with abundant interest, shall be paid in the next. A cringing

parsimony may swell its little gains for a season ; but it is the parent and presage of future poverty—a state of want which no charity can relieve and no sympathy can solace.

Soon after the removal of Lot, Abraham also, in obedience to divine direction, and not at the suggestion of avarice, removed from Bethel to the plains of Mamre in Hebron : where he appears to have spent the larger portion of the residue of his life. From this circumstance, we call him the Patriarch of Hebron. Here, as at every other place of his sojourn, he manifested the governing principle of his soul, by erecting an altar for the worship of God. By these monuments of piety and devotion, every stage of his pilgrimage was marked ; and happy are they, who, at a dying hour, shall be able to trace their journey through life, by monuments of equal interest and worth. Each altar, with its burning sacrifice, was a light-tower to illumine his path to the skies.

## CHAPTER V.

### ABRAHAM DELIVERS LOT FROM CAPTIVITY.

Terrific war ! dire scourge of nations—foe  
Of all things good, and source of every wo—  
Time's earliest records tell thy monster birth,  
But soon thy power shall perish from the earth;  
Thy hecatombs have bled on every shore,—  
The day is near when they shall bleed no more.

*Anon.*

ALL history is full of the horrors of war. If we had no other evidence of the deep depravity of mankind than their readiness, often for the slightest causes, to fight and slaughter each other, sending hundreds, sometimes thousands, in a few hours, into the eternal world, and filling whole communities with terror and with suffering, even this would be evidence sufficiently conclusive. The beasts of the field may fight, because they have neither reason to disclose to them the evils of war, nor conscience to impress on them its criminality, nor the power of sympathy in sufficient strength to feel for another's sufferings. Beasts of prey

may fight, because, in addition to all this, it is their nature to live by the destruction of inferior animals. Nevertheless, neither of these classes make systematic war on their fellows of the field or the forest. A sharp contest may arise in a moment of rage, and a fierce encounter from the impulse of hunger ; and in both cases there may ensue suffering and death. But widely different from this, is war in the hands of man. A small provocation, which a magnanimous spirit would have overlooked, has involved kingdoms in all the miseries of war, for years in succession. Cities have been pillaged and burned, women and children carried away as slaves, and the flower of mighty nations cut down as grass by the mower's hand. All this has sometimes happened to gratify a king's ambition. He desired a broader extent of country to reign over, or the name of a victorious warrior. And for this, thousands must die on the field of battle, and perhaps tens of thousands mourn their death, and pine in captivity and wretchedness.

Scarcely any other animal will prey upon

his own race. Man wages war against his fellow-man. He does it, as has been intimated, *systematically*. The ingenuity of the sagacious is put to its utmost stretch of invention, and months are consumed, in devising the most effectual means to injure, oppress, overthrow, and sometimes to exterminate those whom God made of the same blood, to dwell in harmony and love. Scarcely any spectacle could be more shocking, or more humiliating to human nature, than a collection of all the implements of torture and death, which, in different ages, have been employed by the various tribes of men, in their conflicts with each other.

The art, or at least, the practice of war is of early origin. The first instance recorded in authentic history, occurred in the time of Abraham, and is given in the 14th chapter of Genesis. The five kings of the Plain of Jordan where Lot dwelt, had been for twelve years subject to Chedorlaomer, king of Elam. At length, however, they rebelled; and this brought on a war, in which Chedorlaomer with three other petty sovereigns conquered

the kings of the plain in the valley of Siddim, a part of the present site of the Dead Sea. Among the captives, they carried away Lot and his family, with all his moveable possessions. Lot began now to lament the choice which he had made of the rich plain of the Jordan. This, however, was only the beginning of his sorrows. As he pursued his weary way in the rear of the victorious army, anticipating nothing but a long and slavish captivity in a land of tyrants, how must the remembrance of the wealth which he had just lost, and the society of the pious Abraham which long before he had abandoned apparently with little reluctance, have embittered his distress. Let us, in imagination, follow him as he moves forward, closely guarded by his captors. One day after another had worn heavily away, and night again was coming on, though with little promise of relief for the miserable captives. The victors, exulting in the success of their expedition, were preparing for a night of festivity and mirth. Star after star had broken forth into brightness in the heavens ; a delightful coolness

was restoring the wasted energies of the soldiers, as, after their sultry march, they lay carelessly about the camp ; but Lot and his company, closely watched by the guard, were restless and melancholy. It was now near the middle watch ; and the voice of revelry began to swell loud and high in the leaders' tents. Presently a sound is heard from without the camp, like that of the trampling of many feet. Then it dies away amid the noisy exultation of the revellers. Soon it becomes distinctly audible. Lot now catches the sound, and raising himself from the earth, recognizes the voice of his uncle Abraham, commanding a long train of well-armed followers instantly to attack the camp, and rescue the captives. With his three hundred and eighteen servants, assisted as it appears, by some of the neighbouring tribes, Abraham had no difficulty in effecting his purpose. The battle was soon over. The army was defeated and the captive family delivered. The fugitive kings, however, were chased as far as Damascus ; and then the servants returned. Joyful was the meeting between the

patriarch and his grateful kinsman ; and most happy was the rescued group, as they gathered around their deliverer, and heard him tell how one escaping from the battle where they had been captured, had given him information of the event ; and how, with rapid march and heart lifted up to God, he had hastened to their rescue.

Such may we suppose to have been the circumstances of the scene, on the only occasion in which Abraham appears in the character of a soldier. To that occasion he did ample justice ; and few of the celebrated heroes of antiquity could have conducted the expedition with more sagacity, or merited, in the result, higher honour. It is believed to be in allusion to this victory of the patriarch over these enemies of God, that Isaiah says—“ He gave them as the dust to his sword, and as driven stubble to his bow.” We would not wish, however, to claim for Abraham, the glory of a military conqueror. His is a far higher and more imperishable renown.

He appears not only to have delivered Lot,

but all the other captives, together with the spoils which had been taken with them. The spoils were restored to the owners, Abraham nobly refusing to receive even a "shoe-latchet," as a remuneration for his services. To him it was reward enough that he had saved the sufferers from the horrors of captivity and the dreariness of exile.

On his return from this expedition, he was met by Melchizedek king of Salem, afterward Jerusalem, who is supposed to have been a righteous and peaceful prince, a worshiper and priest of the Most High God, and a friend of Abraham, though of a far superior rank. He came forth and presented the victorious Patriarch with refreshments of bread and wine, and pronounced on him the blessing of that God whom they both devoutly worshiped. To him, as Priest of Jehovah, Abraham, in turn, gave a tenth part of all which he had taken from the enemy, the spoils not having been, at that time, distributed among the rightful possessors. This Melchizedek was a distinguished type of Christ.\*

\* Heb. vii.

We have, in the preceding narrative, a beautiful exemplification of a particular Providence. A fugitive from among the vanquished, gives intelligence of the defeat and the capture to Abraham. That fugitive was one of his neighbours and confederates. The alarm was given just in time to afford Abraham an opportunity to overtake the army and despoil it of its prey. He overtook it at night, and made the attack under circumstances which gave his little company an advantage over a force probably ten-fold more powerful. In all these particulars it is interesting to notice the hand of God, so arranging events as naturally to induce the happy issue—the deliverance of Lot. Thus God watches over his people, and by means often the most simple, but, at the same time, most unexpected, accomplishes his benevolent purposes concerning them.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE CONFIRMATION OF THE COVENANT.

“ Thee let the fathers own,  
And thee, the sons adore ;  
Join'd to the Lord in solemn vows  
To be forgot no more.

Thy covenant may they keep,  
And bless the happy bands,  
Which closer still engage their hearts  
To honour thy commands.”

ALREADY Abraham had been assured in the communications which he had received from heaven, that his posterity should be, like the dust of the earth, innumerable. Nevertheless, the voice of infancy had not as yet been heard in his tent ; and he began to have some misgivings concerning the fulfilment of the promise. On another occasion when God declared to him, “ I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward,” the patriarch expressed some solicitude, lest he should have no other heir than Eliezer, the steward of his house. But his solicitude was soon dispelled. The divine promise was

repeatedly renewed, and with a solemnity which left no room for doubt.

One night he was by a secret influence led forth alone into the open fields under the cloudless canopy of heaven. Every thing was silent around him, and a delightful train of holy meditation was awakened in his mind. Countless stars were looking down upon him, like so many guardian eyes. In the midst of his reflections, a celestial voice commands him to observe that multitude of shining orbs. He gazed upon them ; but his sight was dazzled by their number and their brightness. "Even so," said the voice, "shall thy seed be;" and the childless man, though now far advanced in years yielded up his soul in perfect reliance on the word of the Almighty benefactor. "He believed, and it was counted to him for righteousness."

The promise was further ratified by a covenant, in a form, and with solemnities common in such transactions at that early age, and not unknown among eastern nations even to a comparatively late period. "A sacrifice was offer-

ed, the victims exactly divided, and the contracting parties passed between the two halves, which lay opposite to each other. Abraham offered a heifer of three years old, a she goat of three years old, a turtle dove, and a young pigeon. These he divided, except the birds, and sat watching till the evening, lest the birds of prey should alight upon them. As the sun declined, a deep sleep fell upon him, and more than common darkness spread around. A voice announced the fact of his posterity, their servitude of four centuries in a foreign land, their return, and their possession of the whole territory from the Euphrates to the sea. As the sun set, the symbol of the deity, a cloud of smoke like that of a furnace, and a flashing fire like that of a lamp, passed between the severed victims, and thus solemnly ratified the covenant."

After a season, notwithstanding the miraculous manner in which God had confirmed his promise, doubts returned both to Abraham and Sarah. The promise was still unfulfilled. Sarah, therefore, has recourse to a custom

which remains to this day in some parts of the eastern world. The lawful wife substitutes a slave in her own place ; and the children proceeding from the connexion have the same rank and privileges, and are accounted, in every respect the same as her own. Thus Hagar, an Egyptian slave bore a son to Abraham, who received the name of Ismael, or Ishmael. His history will be given more at large, in a subsequent chapter. The conduct of Abraham, in listening to the proposition of his wife, although in perfect accordance with the customs of that age, cannot by any means be justified. And perhaps the long trial to which his faith was afterwards subjected, may justly be regarded as an expression of the divine displeasure, and, in some sense, as a punishment of this act. Ishmael himself, as he grew up, became a source of great disquietude to his father, and his final dismissal from the family seems to have been one of the severest trials of his life. Sin and sorrow are inseparable.

But unjustifiable as the act certainly was, both in itself and as growing out of a distrust

of the divine veracity ; it was no more a sin, intrinsically considered, than the almost universal practice of polygamy. In fact, it was the same thing. The female domestics of the family were commonly and by the sanction of current custom, *wives* of the master. This is abundantly exemplified in the domestic history of Jacob. It is one of those things which were *permitted*\* in ancient times, on account of the hardness of men's hearts ; but which were always contrary to the laws of nature, and are now forbidden by the laws of God.

After the birth of Ishmael, thirteen years passed ; and Ishmael was still the only child of Abraham. He was now ninety-nine years old while Sarah was ninety ; and both probably had well nigh abandoned all hope of seeing any other fulfilment of the promise than that which they had already received in the birth of Ishmael. During this long interval of time, there had been an intermission of special communications from above. God had not appeared to

\* Matt. xviii. 8.

Abraham, and he was left to the cultivation of his heart with no other than the ordinary aid of the Divine Spirit. This may be looked upon as a confirmation of what has been intimated in respect to the divine disapprobation of his conduct, in the marriage of Hagar.

But at length the Lord appears ; and while the patriarch falls on his face before the brightness of his presence, declares himself to be the “ Almighty God,” able to do what he had promised, and commands him to walk before him with a perfect heart. He then renews the covenant, engages to multiply him exceedingly, and to make him the father of many nations. In token of this, he changes his name from Abram to Abraham, which signifies *the father of a great multitude*. The provisions of the covenant, which had already received, as we have seen, the confirmation of fire, are now more fully stated. The covenant is declared to be an everlasting covenant, embracing the posterity of Abraham in their generations. The divine favour is specially guarantied to them from age to age, unless they should cut themselves

off from its blessings, as they did at length by obstinate disobedience. The whole land of Canaan, also, is promised to Abraham and his posterity, as an everlasting possession. This part of the covenant, however, is, like the other, to be understood as conditional. All the blessings promised, might be forfeited by transgression.\* Sarah's name is likewise changed from Sarai to Sarah, signifying *Princess*.

Besides all this, more deeply and permanently to impress the minds of Abraham and his descendants, the fact that God had established an unsailing covenant with them, the bloody rite of circumcision was enjoined. This would serve, (1) as a general remembrancer of the divine promises ; (2) as the rainbow was appointed as a *sign* that God would certainly fulfil his engagement, never again to destroy the earth with a deluge, so this was to be a sign, that God would perform what he had promised to Abraham and his posterity ; and (3) it was to be observed as a sort of *pledge* on the part

\* See Deut. xxviii.

of the recipients that they would abide by the covenant, accepting its provisions, and performing its requirements. These three ideas seem to comprehend the purport and design of circumcision.

During these communications, the patriarch had arisen from the ground ; but, overcome with emotions of joy and at the same time with a sense of unworthiness, he prostrates himself again on the earth, and gives utterance to his feelings in a natural laugh. He silently wonders at the divine mercy. “Is it possible that he, now almost a hundred years of age, after so long a period of ‘hope deferred,’ should yet rejoice with Sarah, the parent of a rising race ?” Incredible as it may have appeared, he does not intimate a doubt. He only asks that Ishmael may not be supplanted by the yet unborn son of Sarah. How natural and how beautiful is the attachment of Abraham to his first born child. “O, that Ishmael might live before thee !” So tenderly does the father cling to the child that first awakened the parental feeling in his bosom. His request was granted ;

God promised to bless Ishmael, to make him fruitful—the father of a great nation. Sarah, however, was declared to be the destined mother of the chosen race. Within one year the voice of her son would gladden his lonely tent, and they were directed to call him Isaac.

The revelation being finished, “God went up from Abraham,” ascending into heaven in a visible form, as our Saviour was taken up from the disciples. The patriarch hastened to perform the painful rite prescribed. All the males of his household, including himself, Ishmael, and servants, were subjected to it before the setting sun, an instructive example of *promptitude* in the performance of duty. Thus the covenant received a double confirmation, first in the descent of the Divine presence to consume the sacrifice which Abraham had prepared; and secondly in the solemn and standing rite of circumcision.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE VISIT OF THE ANGELS.

Angels, who wait around the Eternal Throne,  
Did leave their radiant spheres oftentimes of old,  
And with swift wing, descend to minister  
To man. E'en now, 'tis said, they come to wait  
Invisible on all the good, and keep  
Around the saints a guardianship of love.

*Anon.*

ABRAHAM still sojourned in the plains of Mamre, near what was afterwards the city of Hebron. Toward the south and west was a long range of rough, rocky mountains, with here and there a spring of pure water, which sent down its limpid stream, freshening and fertilizing the verdant plains below. It was a wild, romantic region, precisely such as a shepherd, fond of solitude and meditation, would have selected. Here, at mid-day, while the summer sun was pouring down a blaze which seemed almost to scorch the fields, and the flocks were panting beneath the covert of shady rocks and wide-spreading trees, the patri-

arch sat at the door of his tent in the shade of a lofty terebinth. Lost in contemplation, he was scarcely sensible of surrounding objects, till raising his eyes, he beheld three human figures standing at no great distance from him. With that ready hospitality so remarkable among the inhabitants of those regions even to the present day, he hastened to meet and invite them to his tent. There in the cool shade of the sacred tree, he washed the strangers' feet ; and while they sat down to rest, gave orders with a glad heart for a simple but substantial entertainment. He went to the tent which was occupied by Sarah, and directed her to prepare cakes of flour baked on the hearth ; and selecting a fine calf from the herd, gave directions that it should be dressed and made ready for the table. These viands, together with milk fresh and curdled, formed an entertainment sufficiently sumptuous for Abraham and his extraordinary guests. They partook of it in the open air, fanned by the refreshing breezes, under the shelter of the terebinth. The luxuries which have since enervated and destroyed mankind,

were unknown among the simple hearted dwellers on the plains of Hebron. They were satisfied with the gifts of nature, with but little of the refinements of art ; and uninterrupted health and long life were their reward. In addition to this, it may be observed that neither Abraham nor Sarah deemed it *beneath them*, to perform what would now be considered *menial offices*, in waiting on their guests. Pride had not yet learned to exalt even the great above the necessary business of life.

The rites of hospitality having been duly discharged, Abraham soon discovers that the strangers are no common men. One of them, who appeared to be superior in dignity to the rest, inquires for Sarah who had not yet made her appearance, and declares that the promise in respect to her shall soon be fulfilled in the birth of a son. She, standing unseen at the tent door, was heard to laugh, partly perhaps from surprise, but chiefly from incredulity. She could not believe the truth of the promise, often and solemnly as it had been repeated. And, in this instance, she was not only guilty

of unbelief, but also of falsehood ; for when the mysterious visitant inquired—" Wherefore did Sarah laugh," she denied the fact through fear. There may be reason to suspect that Sarah, (and this is not of rare occurrence) was as weak in character as she was beautiful in person ; and some have expressed a doubt whether she was at this time possessed of genuine piety. However this may be, she was manifestly deficient in some of the qualities which are essential to the idea of a virtuous, godly and high-minded woman.

The strangers now took their departure, while Abraham accompanied them on the way toward Sodom. Before this time, he must have discovered that one of his guests was no other than the Divine Being himself in human form. The others were probably only angelic attendants. As they travelled on, the Lord,—for so the superior visitant is called in the sequel of the narrative,—communicated to Abraham the dreadful fact, that the cities of the plain, where Lot dwelt, were about to be destroyed on account of their great wickedness. And while

the two attendants pursued their way, the pious patriarch, whose heart yearned over his beloved nephew, stood and entreated for the devoted cities. Their approaching fate was made known to him, because he had found favour with the Lord, and was to "become a great and mighty nation." "For," said the celestial visitant, "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment." The fact that Abraham would exercise a rigid, though doubtless a kind authority in his family, made him peculiarly the object of the divine regard. On the other hand, it may be laid down as an almost universal truth, that those parents who neglect to maintain strict discipline in their households, entail a train of miseries upon themselves and their children.

Nothing can be more interesting than the expostulation of Abraham, with the Divine Being who had condescended to visit him. This is the first extended prayer recorded in the Bible. After the angels had departed, with

a heart oppressed by the tidings to which he had been listening, and with humble confidence in the divine justice and mercy, he reverently “draws near” to the Lord. He anxiously inquires if the doomed city must perish, provided there be fifty—forty-five—forty—thirty—twenty—ten righteous men, found within its walls. He pleads with great earnestness, “That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right ?” From fifty he descended to ten, the Lord granting him his request in relation to each several number.—There Abraham ceased his intercessions ; for if the city should be spared for ten’s sake, he knew that Lot was safe. This devout negotiation being ended, the parties separate, and Abraham returns to his tent.

How delightful and yet how awful is the view which this narrative presents, of the condescension of the Almighty to human affairs ! He appears to Abraham in a human form, as a way-faring man, with two fellow travellers. He submits to be received and entertained as a

common guest. He assumes no dignity, he displays no splendour ; he communes with the patriarch as one of the same nature and of kindred sympathies. How like the same Being on another mission, as the Saviour of the world ! For doubtless it was he, who, almost two thousand years afterwards, sojourned among men in still deeper humiliation, and finally died for their redemption on the cross.

But while his visit to Abraham was a visit of mercy, it indicated fearful wrath towards the cities of the plain. He, that could condescend in such kindness to the Father of the Faithful, could, on the same visit, sweep into ruin thousands of ungodly men. Thus, while his face beams with a smile of love towards them that obey him ; it wears a frown of terrific vengeance towards all the disobedient.

The narrative also affords great encouragement to intercessory prayer. Nothing, it would seem, could have averted from the family of Lot, the doom which was impending over the city where they dwelt, but the patriarch's intercessions. He pleaded with an

earnestness and an importunity, which could not be denied ; and the object which lay nearest his heart, in his entreaties, was vouchsafed to him. This is a beautiful exemplification of the manner and success of that fervent, effectual prayer of the righteous man, which availeth much.

And who will not be encouraged by such an example ? If Elijah was a man of “ like passions ” as other men, subject to the common infirmities and sins of our nature ; so was Abraham. They both were frail, erring men. Yet the one interceded for the salvation of a family amidst a community doomed to utter destruction ; and the other prayed that it might not rain for the space of three years and six months ; and God listened to them both. One was moved by the common affections of humanity ; the other by indignation at the unbelief of Israel, while in each there was the governing principle of love pointing to the glory of God. The former stayed the avenging hand, till Lot was secure ; the latter brought it down in a

fearful visitation of famine upon an ungodly people.

And if they were “of like passions” as other men, and yet prevailed with God in their requests, why may not all men of prayer prevail with him also? Yet who has the spirit of prayer? Who has the boldness, the fervour and the importunity of Abraham? Say not that he was peculiarly the favourite of God. He lived under a dispensation of far more limited privileges. The way to the mercy seat was far less visibly and invitingly open. And the voice of the great advocate at the court of heaven, was far less distinctly heard. The present is emphatically a dispensation of *prayer*. The High Priest has entered into the holy of holies, to encourage our approach with the promise of his unfailing advocacy of our cause. “*Therefore*,”—it is the strong inference of the apostle, “*therefore let us come with BOLDNESS to the throne of grace.*” *Come*, to obtain mercy in all your necessities as a man and as a sinner. *Come*, in every season of doubt, of danger, and distress. *Come*, if unforgiven, and

seek reconciliation with an offended but forbearing God. *Come*, if you already know the preciousness of forgiving love, and plead for the perishing around you. Look, is there not a fiercer flame than that which the divine wrath kindled upon Sodom, in store for the rejecters of the gospel? Is there not a doom denounced less tolerable even than the doom of that devoted city? Look again; and see if within the circle of your own near connexions, there be none in danger of the coming wrath. There is one who openly rejects the offered mercy. There is another, who looks upon all the awful truths of religion with indifference. There is yet another who is walking in the vain show of error and delusion. And some are wandering far away from the fountain of salvation, in the broad paths of unblushing wickedness. O for the faith, the affection, the untiring importunity of Abraham!—A faith that shall seize with a strong grasp upon that arm which is mighty to save; an affection which shall unite the strength of human love to the diviner energies of the soul in its strug-

gle for the victory ; and an importunity which no difficulties shall abate, and no delays discourage. Plead—it is for the precious life—the life of the undying soul !

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE DESTRUCTION OF THE CITIES OF THE PLAIN.

“ See how the lightnings, barbed, red with wrath,  
Sent from the quiver of Omnipotence,  
Cross and re-cross the fiery gloom, and burn  
Into the centre ; burn without, within,  
And help the native fires which God awoke,  
And kindled with the fury of his wrath.”

*Pollok.*

Lot, at the close of the day, was sitting at the gate of Sodom. He had forsaken the open country, and had become a resident in the crowded and voluptuous city. It has also been conjectured by some, that, allured by the hope of more rapid gain, he had abandoned his former occupation, for one more lucrative perhaps, but less safe and happy. This, however, is uncertain. For some purpose or other, it is plain that he had removed within the precincts of the devoted Sodom. Let us picture to ourselves that magnificent city. See it, rising in the midst of a plain of exceeding fertility,

surrounded, as ancient cities uniformly were, with lofty walls and battlements, and abounding in temples dedicated to the worship of false gods. These, crowned with towers and domes, ornamented with arches and colonnades, and relieved here and there with groves of luxuriant foliage, presented a view of most enchanting beauty. We may fancy the pleasure-seeking throngs, men and women, youths and maidens, moving with active step and merry voices along the streets, visiting their favourite places of amusement, or passing out from the gates to enjoy the freer air of the surrounding fields. A thirst for pleasure is the universal passion. Thousands wend their way to the spacious amphitheatres. Equal numbers are seen gathering in the courts of the magnificent temples, and mingling in the wanton dance. While multitudes of others are reclining at the doors and on the roofs of their dwellings, recovering from a former night's debauch. Here are old men grouped together, and, to beguile the infirmities of age and the tedium of time, telling over, with manifest exultation, the shameful feats of

their younger days. And there are companies of children, giving evidence, in their obscene sports, of their premature proficiency in the arts of vice. Every where is exhibited melancholy proof, that the city is given up, in the justice of heaven, to work all uncleanness with greediness, and fill the measure of its iniquity, till the vials of divine wrath shall be poured out without measure.

Yet on no city did the God of Nature ever bestow higher physical advantages. On that rich plain were found, in luxuriant growth, the fruits of almost every clime. Nothing could exceed the beauty of the gardens and the groves, and the richness of the productions, which seemed to spring spontaneously from the soil. Trees of every variety of form, from the lofty palm to the graceful willow; vines bending under the burden of the most delicious clusters; flowers enamelling the fields with a thousand various hues, and perfuming the air with the sweetest fragrance,—delighted the senses and ought to have disposed the heart to gratitude. Yet no gratitude was awakened in

the bosoms of the guilty inhabitants. They rioted in pleasure, and forgot that they were the creatures of God.

Around this magnificent plain, in which were situated several splendid and populous cities besides that of Sodom, were ranges of high mountains, which gave an indescribable wildness and grandeur to the distant view. The scene altogether must have been one of surpassing beauty, combining all the attributes of a perfect landscape. The plain, blooming with the utmost luxuriance of nature, aided with numberless embellishments of art, and encircled with its high mountain wall, might be compared to some brilliant gem glittering in its native bed of rock.

Lot, as has been remarked, was sitting at the gate of the city, enjoying the cool and refreshing evening air, and perhaps indulging in those devout meditations, which the scenery before him was so well suited to inspire. The sultriness of the day was passed ; yet the glowing sky had scarcely begun to fade beyond the blue western heights, crowned here and there

with broken wreaths of clouds, tinged with crimson and gold in all the gorgeousness of a Syrian sunset. Lot had endeavoured to maintain his heart and manners unpolluted by the corruption of the city. Though too much under the influence of mammon, he had not forgotten the God of Abraham. It is not impossible that the disgust he felt at the wickedness around him, served rather to confirm his faith and promote his piety. Deeply had he been vexed and grieved, as an inspired apostle has told us, with the obscene conversation of the inhabitants. We may imagine how contemptuously they would treat him, because he would not accompany them to the same excess of riot. We may almost see them, passing by, as he sat meditating under the broad arch of the gate, taunting him for his gravity, and turning into ridicule his unyielding virtue, and especially his faithful admonitions.

Presently, two angelic beings were seen approaching the gate where Lot was seated. He immediately rose up to meet them, and bowed his face reverently to the ground. They

appeared probably in ordinary human form, and as travellers from a distance. After some solicitation, they consented to accept Lot's proffered hospitality, and spend the night under his friendly roof. Having partaken of a feast kindly prepared for their entertainment, they were about retiring to rest, when the house was surrounded with a clamorous mob, composed of people, young and old, from every quarter of the city. They had seen the strangers enter, and were resolved not to suffer them to depart, till they had perpetrated upon them the basest and most abominable of crimes. Lot, determining rather to submit to any indignity himself, than to expose his guests to such unnatural violence, went out into the street, and besought them to desist, using with them inducements of the most humiliating nature, yet rendered necessary, as *he falsely supposed*, by the peculiarity of the case. They were proceeding to treat him even worse than they had intended to treat the strangers, accusing him of setting himself up as a *judge* among them, a mere sojourner as he was;—when the

angels put forth their hand from the door and rescued him from their grasp, at the same time so affecting the sight of the rioters, that they could prosecute their diabolical design no farther.

These angels appear to have been the same that had visited Abraham, in company with a third, who had apprised him of the terrible destruction which was speedily to fall upon the cities of the plain. They had parted with their chief, who seems to have been no other than God himself in the form of man, and had come straightway to Sodom, for the rescue of Lot and his family in accordance with Abraham's entreaties. While, therefore, the people, in their blindness, were wearying themselves in vain to find the entrance to the dwelling, these celestial visitants communicated to their host the errand on which they had come. "We will destroy this place," said they; "because the cry of them (the cry of their wickedness,) is waxen great before the face of the Lord; and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it." They accordingly gave direction that Lot should im-

mediately prepare to flee, taking with him all his family and connexions. He had two daughters, who were betrothed\* to two young men of Sodom. To these young men he hastened, and besought them to escape from the accursed city. But he seemed to them as one that mocked. They saw no indications of danger, and accounted the old man doubtless to be superstitious or mad.

At length, after a night of unutterable anxiety in the family, the morning dawned. Soon Lot was standing, with his wife and two daughters, at the door of their dwelling, looking for the last time upon the devoted city. There it stood, as firm and beautiful as ever. The gray light was kindling on the stately edifices, revealing here an arch and there a colonnade, while the receding parts lay hid in the deepest shadow. At a little distance, were the fields of Lot, with his flocks and herds and all

\* The word rendered *married* in the common version, is supposed to mean nothing more here than *betrothed*.

his accumulated wealth. Of how little value to him now were the riches, in anticipation of which he had chosen that fertile plain ! As he gazed around him, his heart clung more closely to the spot. Why should he flee ? True, the messengers had foretold to him that the city would be destroyed. But then there appeared no immediate cause of alarm. A balmier air had never breathed, nor a milder morning ever dawned. The sky was clear, the ground sounded firm beneath his feet, and every thing around him wore the aspect of security and peace. The thousands of the city were silent in sleep ; and scarcely a voice was heard, save now and then a shout of some company of revellers, who had worn away the whole night in their carousals. Was it possible that utter ruin was so near ? And then the abandonment of all his possessions ! How could he give them up and go forth a poor, homeless, unprotected wanderer on the face of the earth ! O that he had never parted with the pious Abraham ! Besides, his daughters, how could they consent to leave the city, while those whom

they held dearer than their own lives, must be left behind to perish !

Their delay had been already too long protracted. The hour when the vengeance of heaven was to burst forth upon the guilty cities had arrived. The angels, therefore, laid hold upon the little company, four in number ; and with kind compulsion, brought them forth without the city walls. They were then directed to escape for their lives, not even looking behind them, nor pausing for a moment on their way, till they had reached a place of safety upon the mountains. At Lot's earnest request, however, who, for some reason, was apprehensive of danger upon the mountains, or in his attempt to reach them, they were permitted to flee to a small city at the southern extremity of the plain, then called Bela, but afterward called Zoar ; the signification of which is *Little*. This name was taken from Lot's inquiry—" Is it not a little one ?" As the company set forth on their flight, the directing angel cried after Lot—" Haste thee, escape thither ; for I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither." Such

is the preserving care which God, in his providence, exercises over his friends. His wrath must be stayed till the only righteous family on the plain, had found a place of safety. Perhaps during all this time, Abraham was pleading with the Divine Being who remained with him, for their salvation. At all events he had prayed with great earnestness, continuing his entreaties, till he had obtained assurance that Lot should be spared. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

With rapid steps they hastened to Zoar. Just as they entered it, the sun rose for the last time on the devoted cities. There was no symptom of approaching danger ; and, of the multitudes who were yet sleeping on their pillows or just opening their eyes on the light of day, not one dreamed of the dreadful catastrophe before them. But in an instant they were aroused to the reality of their fate. The ground quaked beneath them ; terrific thunders rent the air ; torrents of liquid fire rushed upon them from above ; if they sought

refuge in their dwellings, they were soon overwhelmed by the massy walls tumbling in promiscuous ruin around them ; and if they fled from death in this form, they were arrested in the street by the hot and suffocating elements. For a few moments, there was a cry, and a wailing, and a running to and fro ; and then all was still, except the earthquake and the sulphurous storm. Not a living creature remained in all the cities of the plain, save in that to which Lot had fled. Death had done its destined work ; and God had given another tremendous testimony of the fearfulness of his wrath against the wicked. Over all the region where the cities stood was soon spread a lake of stagnant water ; as if God would conceal for ever from human view a spot so signalized for wickedness.

Abraham, early in the morning, after the visit of the angels, ascended the summit of a hill, where he had parted with the mysterious Being to whom he had offered his intercessions in Lot's behalf ; and thence looking abroad over the plain of the Jordan, he beheld the

“smoke of the country going up as the smoke of a furnace.” The ground itself, full of pitch and sulphur, was on fire, the water not having as yet accumulated upon it, and presented the appearance of a vast, half smothered conflagration. He needed no other evidence, that the threatening of the Lord had been executed. Lot, however, was given to his prayers. With his daughters, he reached Zoar in safety ; but his wife, in opposition to an express command, and perhaps prompted by feelings of distrust or of repining, looked back, lingering behind, and was changed, in the language of the inspired historian, into “a pillar of salt.” There is no safety, but in strict obedience to the divine commands.

Lot did not remain long in Zoar. Probably he found there a people no less impious than the inhabitants of Sodom, and feared lest they too would soon be overtaken by the judgments of God. He retired therefore to the mountains, where, overcome by wine, he committed incest with his daughters, and became the father of two sons, from whom descended the tribes of

Moab and Ammon. Thus in ancient times, as well as the present, drunkenness was the mother of shameful and abominable wickedness.

Nothing more is known of the history of Lot. The probability is that he lingered out a few miserable years, reflecting on his folly in choosing his portion among the wicked inhabitants of the plain, from so paltry a motive as the love of wealth ; and lamenting still more the crime, into which he had been betrayed by means of intemperance. A happy old age could hardly have crowned a life of such irregular and inconsistent piety. They who would have gray hairs an ornament, and the last days of life days of serenity and peace, must act from higher motives than those of selfishness ; and by an undeviating course of rectitude and piety, “ lay up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come.”

How fearful is the exhibition here presented of the wrath of God ! Verily to his enemies he is “ a consuming fire ;” and it is no light

matter to provoke his anger. "He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." He hated sin no more in the guilty inhabitants of Sodom, than he hates it in such as now transgress his commands: nay, "it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment," than for those who, with the Bible open in their hands and the invitations of mercy sounding in their ears, still harden their hearts in impenitency. However kind Providence may now appear, they are nevertheless "treasuring up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." Present prosperity to them is only a prelude to a more dreadful overthrow. Their sky is bright to-day, only to make the coming tempest more terrific. While all around looks safe and fair, there is a secret work going on undermining their foundations; and at length they must fall in total and irrecoverable ruin. As in the case of Lot, it is with difficulty that the good escape; "and if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear!" "Turn ye to the strong hold,

ye prisoners of hope." " Escape for thy life ; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain ; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed."

## CHAPTER IX.

### ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF HUMAN INFIRMITY.

Man—boasted lord of all below,  
How weak, how prone to stray ;  
How frail of purpose, and how slow  
To learn the better way !

Experience, monitress severe,  
Oft spreads her page in vain ;  
The tempter's syren voice we hear,  
And straight transgress again !

*Anon.*

ABRAHAM had now been pasturing his flocks in the region of Hebron nearly twenty years. For some unknown reason, he at length removes toward what is called “the south country.” It is not unlikely that he expected richer pasturage for his flocks and herds in this region, than could be obtained upon plains and hills which had so long been occupied. It is necessary now, and it undoubtedly was also in ancient times, for shepherds in those countries to remove somewhat frequently, seeking fresh grazing fields for their increasing numbers of sheep and cattle.

The place which he selected for his new sojourn, is called Gerar. Whether it is the same that is marked by that name on our common maps, is uncertain. The situation of this is not south, but nearly west from Hebron. It seems to have been a settlement just within the border of the land of the Philistines. Isaac once took refuge there in a time of famine. Abimelech, who then reigned as king over the country, is denominated (Gen. xxvi. 1,) king of the Philistines.

From all that is related of this prince, it appears that he was friendly to Abraham, and not altogether a stranger to the true God. By some means or other, he had retained some knowledge and reverence of his character, amid the almost universal ignorance and idolatry which prevailed around him. This is the more remarkable, as the Philistines are supposed to have originated in Egypt, where idolatry and superstition were carried to greater lengths of absurdity, than among most other ancient nations. Yet there is no tribe, even in the darkest corners of the heathen world, so

completely shut out from the means of divine knowledge, as necessarily to pass on to the judgment, in utter and hopeless ignorance of religious duty and the great object of religious worship. The king of Gerar may have been one of the few, who have risen above all disadvantages ; and in the midst of general darkness have struck out light from their own minds, or gathered up the rays which are scattered over the face of nature, to guide them to the knowledge of the God of heaven.

When Abraham had arrived in the land of Gerar, he fell into the same sin, of which he had been guilty when, many years before, he was compelled by famine to retire into Egypt. Sarah, though above ninety years of age, was still beautiful ; so beautiful that her husband feared for her safety, and his own on her account, when the king of the country should become acquainted with her charms. They therefore agree to practise the very deception on Abimelech which they had practised on Pharaoh. How strange that he should not have learned wisdom from former experience !

And yet we have in his example a mirror which reflects the history of thousands—good men, men of exalted virtue, yet weak in some point of character, and at that point repeatedly betrayed into sin. Such instances of human frailty, how humiliating, how instructive—“Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall!” Verily, human strength is weakness. “In thee, O God, in thee alone are all our springs.”

“She is my sister,” said Abraham, as one and another of the Philistines curiously inquired concerning the relationship between him and the woman who shared his tent. “He is my brother,” said Sarah to those who repeated the inquiry. Thus it seemed to be made certain that no other relationship subsisted between them. The consequence was, she was removed to the royal court, to partake in the honour or disgrace belonging to such a situation. God, however, as before, mercifully preserved her from all evil. Before the arrangements for her reception as a new royal bride were completed, the king was informed in a miraculous dream,

that Sarah was the wife of the stranger whom she had accompanied to Gerar ; and that to proceed with his plans would be at the hazard of his life. He awoke with that dreadful sound ringing in his ears—“ Thou art but a dead man.” Abimelech lost no time in restoring Sarah to her husband, whom he called to account for the deception which he had practised upon him, and by which he had well nigh involved him and his people in heavy calamities. Abraham gave substantially the same explanation in this as in the former instance—adding, however, that the agreement between him and Sarah, to deceive, whenever such an occasion should seem to require it, was one into which they had entered, when they first left their native land, and commenced their wandering, pastoral life. They doubtless thought it necessary, and therefore excusable ; but if all things which we might fancy necessary were excusable, how few vices would remain to be condemned !

The sensibility of Abimelech is peculiarly worthy of notice. No sooner does he discover

the truth in relation to Sarah, than he hastens to do all that duty and honour required. He speaks of the sin to the borders of which he had been inadvertently led, with manifest abhorrence. “What hast thou done unto me, and what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought upon me and on my kingdom a *great sin?* Thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done.” This is not the language of an ignorant, sensual, low-minded heathen. The same may likewise be said of the manner in which he treats the offending husband. Instead of inflicting on him a heavy punishment, as might have been expected, he loads him with gifts—sheep, oxen, servants, and a thousand pieces of silver, and bids him choose for himself whatever portion of the country he preferred for his sojourn. Who can fail to recognise here the overruling hand of God, preserving his servant from all harm, and making the most untoward circumstances work together for his good. The knowledge of the very fact, which Abraham had apprehended, if known, would prove the occasion

of his death, becomes the occasion of a great increase of his possessions. So greatly does human wisdom mistake, when it adopts expedients contrary to truth and virtue.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE LONG DEFERRED PROPHECY FULFILLED.

“ And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac.”—*Gen. xxi. 3.*

GERAR was destined to be the birth-place of Isaac. For sixty years Abraham had been held in suspense, encouraged by the oft-repeated and solemnly ratified promise of God, that he should be the father of many nations ; and yet subjected to all the heart-sickness of hope deferred. It is impossible to determine, whether this trial of his faith was intended simply to give strength to his character, teaching him the important lesson of patience and submission ; or whether it was designed as a punishment of the sins, into which, as we have seen, he was betrayed. Henry suggests, that

God may have denied to Abraham and Sarah the blessing which they doubtless desired above all others, because they had entered into a compact to deny one another. We hear no more of any such denial after the instance just related. Perhaps it is not unreasonable to suppose, that they at this time saw their error and repented of it. Certain it is, that soon after this, their desires were fulfilled ; and Sarah's heart was gladdened with a joy, higher and purer perhaps than mother ever felt, except only the mother of the infant Saviour.

Abraham was now a hundred years old, and probably he supposed that his trials were at length at an end. The dark cloud which had so long rested on his prospects, had vanished, and he could see in the distant future, in clearer vision than he had ever before attained, the bright fulfilment of the plan which connected his paternity with the richest blessings of the world. Though believers are required to walk by faith and not by sight, yet such is human weakness, that *sight*, an occasional glimpse at least, is necessary to sustain the drooping

heart. Abraham was now a father ; and he could with less difficulty conceive, that a mighty nation was to arise from the line of Isaac ; possess the whole extent of country, which he had traversed in his wanderings ; receive from age to age communications from heaven which would enlighten the world ; and give birth, at a remote period, to a great Deliverer, the Redeemer of mankind.

It is no wonder, therefore, that Abraham's joy was great, on an occasion which could not have been otherwise than joyful to any parent, under more ordinary circumstances. There was the joy of gratitude, heightened perhaps by wonder ; there was also the joy of hope, for the promise was as yet only fulfilled in the bud. A vast range yet remained for future development. All this was added to the peculiar joy which swells the parent's heart, when he clasps for the first time a fresh germ of immortality to his bosom.

The child was named Isaac, agreeably to a divine direction. The word signifies *laughter*, and was designed to remind the parents of the

laughing of the one, from emotions of gladness ; and of the other, from a feeling of distrust, when the birth of their son was predicted. It is worthy of special remark, how scrupulously they obey the intimations of the divine will. *God has so directed*, was all the authority they needed to determine their course, in matters whether apparently trivial or important. In respect both to the name and the ceremony of circumcision, the divine appointment was faithfully followed.

When the most critical period of the child's life had passed, and it required no longer to be nourished on the mother's breast, a festival was observed expressive of thankfulness and joy, that the dangers attendant on the first entrance on the stream of life were over. This festival was usually kept by the Jews, when the child had reached the age of thirty or thirty-six months. It was a beautiful custom, deriving its origin perhaps from Abraham's example, but having its foundation in the nature of man. Festivals as well as fasts, seasons of rejoicing as well as of sorrow, are pro-

per and comely in their place ; and when they are observed in the fear of God, they are doubtless pleasing in his sight.

Feasting, however, is a far different thing, in these degenerate times, from the simple festivals of the patriarchs. Now, every thing of this nature has degenerated into luxury. When men feast, though on strictly religious occasions, the entertainment is sumptuous, but the heart is dead. There is pampering of appetite, but no elevation of soul ; there is rejoicing, but no gratitude. Simplicity was the crowning excellence of Abraham's festivities. "A calf tender and good," dressed in the plainest manner, and cakes baked on the hearth, with butter and milk, sufficed for the entertainment of angels. How much more would they suffice for an ordinary feast ?

Abraham's delight at this festive season, appears not to have been unalloyed. Ishmael, the son of Hagar, displeased as many an ill-tempered boy would have been, to see the parade in the family on Isaac's account, and fearing perhaps that he should be supplanted

in his father's affections, began to *mock*, as his insolent behaviour is significantly termed. This led to his dismission from the family, in a manner which must have been excessively painful to the father's feelings, but which was apparently necessary for the peace of the domestic circle. Such conduct in the young is both highly criminal in itself, and unhappy in its consequences. It must always tend to evil, and not unfrequently, as in the case of Ishmael, to evil which will embitter a long life. But the history of the father of the Arabians, we must reserve for a separate chapter.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE HISTORY OF ISHMAEL.

Youth, what is it ? wise one, say  
Morning of life's little day ?  
Let that morning know no blight ;  
Else the day will be as night :—  
Spring-time of the growing year ?  
Set the plants of virtue here.  
'Tis the seed-plot, youth beware,  
Of whate'er in life we are.

*Anon.*

ISHMAEL, as we have already seen, was the son of Hagar, a maid-servant of the family. He seems to have inherited his mother's disposition, which was by no means one of the most amiable. In anticipation of the honour of his birth, she assumed an air of superiority and arrogance, which her mistress could not endure. The consequence was, the maid-servant, harshly treated by Sarah, fled into the wilderness. There the angel of the Lord looked upon her distress, promised that her son should be the father of a numerous people, and

directed her to return and submit herself to her mistress. She obeyed, and soon after became the mother of Ishmael.

We hear no more of the youth for more than fourteen years. How these years were spent it is in vain to inquire; but we may well suppose that although to us they are a blank in his history, they were not a blank to him in the formation of his character. Under the forming hand of such a mother, he must have received impressions which probably contributed not only to determine what he was himself to be, but to influence and shape the destinies of his descendants. So vast is the responsibility of the parent.

The misconduct of Ishmael, to which allusion was made in the preceding chapter, did not escape the notice of Sarah. She had good reason to suppose that the lad was jealous of his younger brother, and to apprehend that the envy which had assumed so bold a form at so early a period, would ripen at length into more serious mischief. Such a temper as Ishmael manifested, if not seasonably overcome, gene-

rally grows with the growth and strengthens with the strength, till malignity becomes the settled habit of the mind. Thus many a youth has been trained, or rather has trained himself, for a life of revengeful passion and flagrant crime. He who in his early years can *mock* at a feast, because a younger brother receives more attention than is paid to himself, will be very likely, in later life, to be found as was Ishmael, with “his hand against every man, and every man’s hand against him.” Nothing can be more important, therefore, in the formation of character, than to restrain passions at their first outbreaking, and subject them to a rigid and uncompromising control.

It was perfectly natural for Sarah, under the circumstances of the case, to seek the expulsion of the offending youth, together with his mother, by whom she might suspect he was encouraged in his insolence, from the family and the neighbourhood. She was unwilling to train her son amid the influences and the dangers which seemed to be inseparable from his residence with them. Or it might have been

simply from a sudden feeling of resentment, that she desired and demanded his removal. Such a demand might be praised in a prudent mother, and expected in a proud and passionate one.

Accordingly, we are not surprised to hear Sarah call her husband and say—"Cast out this bond-woman and her son ; for the son of this bond-woman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac." The reason here assigned by her for requiring them to be removed, may appear to be not the most honourable ; and yet when we consider what God had promised to the descendants of Abraham in the line of Sarah, and take into view at the same time the insolent behaviour of Ishmael, there is found in what she did, nothing particularly worthy of censure.

It was, however, very grievous to the father. To send away his son, his eldest and for many years his only son ; to treat him as an outcast who was no longer to share his favour, and was never to have part in his possessions—was one of the most painful trials of his life.

The lad was now nearly grown ; he had engrossed largely the father's affection ; had beguiled, by his sprightliness, many a lonely hour in his tent ; and even since the birth of Isaac, he maintained a strong hold upon his heart. In his features and form, Abraham had first learned to trace his own image, and that image was becoming more and more manifest with every advancing year. He looks upon the lad all unconscious of his fate. He watches the bright, cheerful play of his countenance ; and thoughts of his own youthful days in the dwelling of Terah rush upon his mind, and melt him into tears. And must he turn him forth as a stranger and an alien, to wander with his mother in the wilderness, to perish perhaps with famine, or fall a prey to some ravenous beast ? He shrinks from it with all the tender reluctance of paternal fondness. What a delightful view does this incident afford of Abraham's character ! With all the dignity of the patriarch we see united the utmost tenderness of affection.

But it was the divine will that Ishmael should

be removed. The father was therefore directed by a voice from heaven to send him and his mother away; and to relieve his sorrow he was assured that, although Isaac was to be his sole heir, the inheritor of the peculiar blessings long since promised, yet Ishmael also should be so far prospered as to be the father of a great nation.

Simple was the ceremony of their dismissal. Abraham furnishes them with a supply of bread and of water,\* and commanding them in

\* The terms, "bread" and "water," may include whatever was necessary for the support of the wanderers during a considerable journey. *Water* was then the common and almost the only beverage; and *bread* included all those substances used as food.

We should mistake, were we to suppose that Abraham acted an unnatural part, on this occasion, even if we were to leave out of view the fact that he acted under divine direction. It was no uncommon thing for fathers to send their sons away to a distant region, to seek their own independent fortunes. Abraham did no more, except that he sent Ishmael away at an immature age. He doubtless

silence, as we may imagine, to the protection of a kind Providence, points out their lonely way, and turns his back on them for ever. It must have been to him a moment of exquisite anguish ; but it was of the Lord ; and he must neither shrink from his duty nor repine under his trials. Moreover, it was no small comfort to him, that the divine blessing was promised to the poor wanderer. A pious confidence in God, therefore, soon dried his tears ; and as he returned to his tent and pressed Isaac to his bosom, the void in his heart did not long remain unfilled.

Hagar went forth with her son and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. Beersheba was a mountainous region at the southern ex-

directed Hagar and her son to some place, where they might easily obtain a livelihood, and where Ishmael would be likely to become great and prosperous. On their journey to that place, they lost their way and came near perishing. But God, who had promised to bless him, interposed ; and the issue was precisely what the patriarch had probably anticipated.

tremity of the Holy Land, thirty or forty miles from Gerar, and probably at that time thinly inhabited. Here the wretched exiles having lost their way remained, removing from place to place without aim or object, except to relieve the restlessness of a desponding mind. How should they obtain sustenance in the wilderness? What could be before them but starvation and death? Their stock of bread was already consumed, and the leathern sack of water which Abraham had placed on Hagar's shoulder, would soon be exhausted. Hunger was beginning to do its work, and thirst, it seemed, must necessarily hasten the issue. For a few days, however, they contrived to live on such poor aliment as the roots and wild fruits of the desert afforded; but when they had drained the last drop from their water-sack, courage utterly failed them, and they sunk down in despair. The mother, with an unnatural effort, summoning all her remaining strength, took up her son, now too weak to support himself, and cast him under a thick mass of shrubbery, that he might be sheltered,

while he lived, from the burning rays of the sun, and be less exposed, when dead, to the devouring beasts that roamed the wilderness. What a trial to a mother's heart! She stood for a moment, watching his agony and listening to his groans; for famine and thirst were gnawing fiercely, and making rapid inroads upon life. She could endure it no longer. It was her only son. She therefore retired and "sat her down over against him a good way off,—for she said, let me not see the death of the child." "And she lifted up her voice and wept." But often, when human wisdom fails, divine compassion interposes. To Hagar, death appeared inevitable, both for herself and for Ishmael. Their fate was apparently sealed. Doubtless they reflected with shame and sorrow on the circumstances which had led to their dismission from the family of Abraham. How dear is the cost, oftentimes, of a single inconsiderate act! Had not Hagar been insolent, had not Ishmael "mocked," they might have been enjoying plenty and peace in the pious patriarch's tent. The mother wept in the bitterness

of her soul ;—perhaps the tears were in part the tears of penitence. The lad cried aloud in his anguish ;—possibly his distress was in part for his own misconduct—his cries, for the mercy of Him who alone could help in such an extremity.

The voice of divine compassion was heard. And the angel of God called to Hagar, while she sat weeping in expectation of death. A loud call startled her from her reverie of grief. She awoke as from a dream, and listened. “ What aileth thee, Hagar ? ” inquired the invisible messenger. “ Fear not ; for God hath heard the voice of the lad. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand ; and I will make him a great nation.”

She had, in her distress, forgotten the divine promise which was made to her concerning her son, before his birth. Grief and fear had completely effaced the impression of it from her mind. But now that it is repeated, the remembrance of it is revived ; and she begins to recover courage. Opening her eyes, swollen with long weeping, she discovers a well of

water. Here she fills her sack, and hastening to Ishmael, raises his head, and assists him to drink the reviving draught. It is like life from the dead. This simple beverage of nature cools the fever which was raging in his veins.

Ishmael, henceforward, was the object of a kind Providence, and his subsequent course was comparatively prosperous. He soon found means to support himself and his mother in the wilderness. As he grew up, he became an expert archer, and could bring down the deer as he bounded among the mountains, with every shot of his bow. Emigrating at length to Paran, a desert country some distance south-east of Beersheba, his mother, who seemed still to exercise a wholesome guardianship over him, "took him a wife out of the land of Egypt." Paran was, from that time, the place of his abode; and there he became the father of twelve sons, the heads of the twelve tribes of the Arabians. Thus in him the divine promise was fulfilled; his descendants were numerous and powerful; and they have answered

the description of their progenitor, that "his hands should be against every man, and every man's hand against him." They inherit to this day the peculiar characteristics of Ishmael, and show, in a wonderful manner how a single individual may sometimes impress his character upon countless multitudes through successive generations.

## CHAPTER XII.

### NEW TESTIMONY TO ABRAHAM'S GREATNESS.

“ I saw a form of excellence, a form  
Of beauty without spot, that none could see  
And not admire : It was the form of Virtue ;—  
Naught else hath God given countenance so fair.  
No being once created rational,  
Can banish Virtue from his sight, or once  
Forget that she is fair.”

*Pollok.*

THE prosperity of Abraham was so remarkable as to attract the special notice of Abimelech, the king of the country. He did not, however, regard the stranger with envy or jealousy, but with admiration, and a desire to secure his friendship. Accordingly, in company with Phichol, the chief captain of his army, he came from the city where he dwelt to make the patriarch a visit. The language in which the king accosts him, shows the high estimation in which he was held. “ God is with thee in all that thou doest.” What higher

praise could have been bestowed ! There was evidently a peculiar providence which had Abraham's affairs in charge, and crowned with prosperity every work of his hands. An invisible guardian attended him. From the evils which his neighbours suffered he was so far exempt, and in the blessings which they shared he shared so much more abundantly, that Abimelech was constrained to acknowledge his superiority. "God is with thee." Happy are all they of whom such testimony can be given.

They who faithfully serve the God of Abraham, may expect to be blessed as he was, if not with wealth and power and outward prosperity, at least with durable riches and righteousness. Religion is not incompatible with success in worldly business ; but is often directly conducive to it. He who delights in the law of the Lord, "shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season : his leaf also shall not wither ; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." This is true just so far as the

*spiritual* prosperity of the friends of God will permit; but where they must suffer either in their temporal affairs or in their spiritual condition, it is certainly a kindness in the government of God to inflict temporal chastening, in order to secure so much more valuable a good. On the whole, they may be said to be prospered even then.

It was the object of Abimelech in visiting Abraham at this time, to make a treaty or covenant with him, and secure the patriarch's friendship and kindness toward himself and his descendants. Abraham was sufficiently powerful to do him no small injury in time of war, if he had the disposition. It was natural, therefore, for the king to seek some security against it. He had dealt kindly with Abraham from his first settlement in the country, and had good reason to claim kindness in return. A solemn covenant was accordingly entered into, and confirmed by an oath.

Abraham seems to have removed from the place where he first established himself in the country of Abimelech, and gradually tended

toward the south. Here a difficulty occurred about a matter, of far greater importance than many which have resulted in serious and bloody wars; a difficulty nevertheless which, under the wise management of Abraham, was soon and amicably settled. Wells of water in a country where springs are rare, and suffering often great on account of drought, are exceedingly valuable; and to deprive a family or tribe of a well or fountain, would be an act in the highest degree oppressive—an atrocious outrage. Such an outrage was committed by the servants of Abimelech upon Abraham. They violently took possession of a well which belonged to him, and which was probably necessary for the daily use of his flocks and herds. He consequently entered a complaint to the king, and the whole matter was immediately and satisfactorily adjusted. They made another covenant, ratifying it with reciprocal gifts of considerable value; and a controversy which, between other chiefs of that age, would have been likely to end in a long contest and much bloodshed, was brought to a peaceful and

friendly termination. The well was thence called Beersheba, the *well of the oath*, in commemoration of the event. There Abraham planted a grove, which he consecrated as a kind of temple for the worship of the "Everlasting God," and "sojourned in the land of the Philistines many days."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC.

“ By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac ; and he that had received the promises, offered up his only-begotten son ; of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called. Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead ; from whence also he received him in a figure.”—*Heb. xi. 17–19.*

SIXTY-FIVE years had now elapsed since God manifested himself to Abraham, and called him from Ur of the Chaldees. During a large proportion of that time, he had been held, as we have seen, in anxious suspense, vacillating between hope and fear, often perplexed though never completely in despair. His faith, severely tried as it was, seems generally to have remained unshaken. The early promise which had led him to anticipate the highest honour of a patriarch—a numerous and happy posterity, had been often and variously re-

peated ;—and after nearly forty years of tantalizing delay, had been fulfilled in the birth of Isaac. At last, the good man no doubt imagines his trials are over. His favourite son—his only son, indeed, for Ishmael is to him as if he were not—is now arrived at mature years ; and in him is realized all that a father's fond heart could desire. He has passed the most dangerous period of life ; his frame has the compactness and vigour of manhood ; his cheek bears the bloom of health ; there is energy in his step ; and buoyancy in every movement. Submissive and obedient, cheerful and kind, he is the life of the patriarch's old age ; and as he looks upon his son, and watches the progressive development of his character, giving assurance that the warmest anticipations of parental love will not be disappointed, his bosom swells with emotions of gratitude, not unmixed perhaps with some little alloy of natural pride.

One night, as the patriarch is lying in his tent, dreaming, as we may suppose, of Isaac, the pride and promise of his family, and feasting his fancy on golden visions of the future

glory of his line, he is suddenly awaked by that voice which had so often spoke to him from heaven. The well known voice pronouncing the name of Abraham cannot be mistaken. Starting from his pillow, he exclaims—“Behold, here I am.” It is a reverential and submissive reply to the heavenly call, intimating a readiness to receive whatever instruction and obey whatever command the divine messenger might be about to communicate. But, little did he anticipate what was to follow. Possibly he had been too much elated with the brightness of his prospects; and his heart, almost intoxicated with joy, needed another trial to restore the balance of humble and sober dependence. Again the voice breaks on his ear—“*Take now thy son!*”—The father’s breast begins to swell with anxiety;—“Take my son! and what more? It cannot be that aught of harm is in store for Isaac.” “*Thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest,*” the mysterious voice continues, awakening still more the father’s solicitude; for there is something manifestly ominous in the tone. He listens eagerly

to know the conclusion and purport of the message—“*And get thee into the land of Moriah.*” Every expression is fitted to go to the heart, and each, in the succession, with increasing force, causing every chord of parental tenderness to vibrate. “Thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest—him on whom all thy hopes depend, and in whom the precious promises of God are centred—take him and depart to the land of Moriah.” All these circumstances are enumerated, as if to arouse, in their utmost keenness, the parent’s sensibilities, before the final issue of the whole is made known. What can be the object of this strange journey? Possibly, after all, the issue may be happy. On mount Moriah, God may design to bestow some signal blessings upon Isaac;—but still the object of the journey is a mystery; and still the father’s soul yearns with intolerable solicitude to know the event. Again the voice speaks—“*Offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of!*” What a commission for a father! “Offer him for a burnt-offering, slay

him, immolate him with thine own hand ! Go to that distant mount ; prepare the altar ; bind thy son upon it ; shed his blood, closing thine ears against his cry ; and applying the torch, let him consume to ashes before thine eyes !” O, if this might have been done by another hand ; if Isaac might have been smitten down by the lightning of heaven, or wasted away under some incurable disease, it could have been borne. But for the parent to sacrifice his only child—to be at once the agent and the witness of his expiring agonies, was more, one would think, than human nature could endure. “ And is it for this,” Abraham might naturally have exclaimed, “ is it for this that I have wandered an exile, in perplexing suspense between hope and despondency, these three-score years ? Is this to be the issue of that promise which I have so long waited for, and at last seen fulfilled, only to plunge me into deep and hopeless disappointment ! On that funeral pile, lighted by my own hand, are all my cherished expectations to be consumed for ever ?

But not a syllable of this escaped the patri-

arch's lips. He knew in whom he had believed. His past trials had not been in vain. His confidence in the faithfulness of God was unshaken. Patience had well nigh had its perfect work ; and he had no fears that He who had borne him safely through six trials, would forsake him in the seventh. Committing his cause, therefore, to Him who judgeth righteously, he resolved to obey the command.

The night passed away, we may well imagine, in sleepless anxiety attended with much fervent prayer ;—and no sooner had the gray light of morning risen on the distant hills, than Abraham arose and prepared for his journey. He stopped not to confer with flesh and blood. He locked the dreadful secret fast in his own bosom. Not even to Sarah does it seem to have been communicated. He feared counsel—he feared delay. Perhaps he apprehended that a wife's remonstrances and tears would unman him for a duty which required all the firmness of his nature. He did not even pause to deliberate with himself. He knew the command was from heaven, and that he had no-

thing to do but obey. Thus his faith wrought with his works, and by works was made perfect. Such is the faith which God demands, which gives strength to character, furnishes impulse to duty, and secures a certain victory over the world.

The preparation is soon completed. There is little to be done, except to select two young men from among the servants of the family, cleave a small quantity of wood for the burnt-offering, prepare such simple provision as was needed for the journey, get Isaac in readiness, saddle an ass, and set forward toward the place appointed. All this is done with the coolness of a collected and confiding mind, so that no painful suspicions are excited either in Isaac or his mother. The sun is scarcely risen on the summits of the Philistine mountains, when the little company are in motion, winding slowly along the valleys, and approaching the place of Abraham's former sojourn in Hebron. How admirable the promptitude of the patriarch ! It must have been inconceivably painful to take leave of his family under circumstances

like these, and doubtless bitter tears were wept when he embraced his wife at parting, and received from her lips the affectionate charge, to exercise a watchful care over Isaac.

The first night was very probably spent in Hebron, which lay directly in their way, and at about one third of the distance which they had to travel. The second day was consumed in weary travel and solemn reflection ; and the third was now wearing away, when the mount of sacrifice was descried afar off. They had ascended an eminence, commanding an extensive view of the country before them ; and Abraham, lifting up his eyes, discovered the summit of Moriah, designated perhaps by some visible sign, a fiery cloud or other supernatural appearance, which Abraham immediately understood. It was a mountain in the land of Moriah, the same, as some suppose, where Solomon's temple was afterwards built, or, as others maintain, where the great atoning sacrifice was offered.

Here Abraham paused ; and giving the beast of burden in charge to the young men, and

pointing to the mountain on which the divine symbol rested, said—"Abide ye here,—while I and the lad go yonder and worship, and come again unto you." His faith was strong that, even should Isaac be sacrificed, he would be restored by the power of God; for the divine promise could not fail. He trusted that he should receive him back to his embrace though it were from the ashes of the sacrifice.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

“ When we least expect his aid,  
The Saviour will appear.

This Abraham found : he raised the knife ;  
God saw, and said—Forbear !  
Yon ram shall yield his meaner life ;—  
Behold the victim there.” *Cowper.*

HAVING left the young men behind, lest they should be a hinderance to him in the performance of his heart-rending duty, and laying on Isaac’s shoulder the wood for the sacrifice, as the cross was afterwards laid on the Saviour, he took in his own hand the fire and the knife, and proceeded with his son toward the mountain. A very few paces brought them to its base. And now they begin to toil up its rugged ascent, the son unconscious of what was before him, struggling under his burden ; while the father, knowing it all, experienced a still harder struggle in his own bosom. For, al-

though he did not despair of the restoration of Isaac, yet surely it was no light matter for a fond father to bind an only child and tenderly loved, like a lamb upon the altar, thrust the knife into his throbbing breast, and then see the body consume in the flame till nothing was left but a blackened cinder or a mass of smouldering ashes. Few could have contemplated such a scene with composure; whatever might be their expectation concerning the issue. And Abraham's feelings must have been rendered more agonizing by Isaac's innocent and unsuspecting inquiry :—“ My father, behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?” We can almost see the affectionate father turn away his face to conceal the gushing tears, while with a trembling voice he answers,—“ My son, God will provide a lamb for a burnt-offering.” Never was a tenderer reply returned to a more touching inquiry.

Isaac was entirely ignorant of the object of the journey. Though now twenty-five or thirty years old, he had all the artless simplicity of

childhood. He had often, no doubt, accompanied Abraham, when he went forth to sacrifice to the Lord in the grove at Beersheba ; and he supposed that all these preparations were only for a more solemn sacrifice of the same general character.

Abraham's reply may be thought to need some explanation. Did he intend to deceive his son, when he said that God would provide a lamb for a burnt-offering ? Or had he a presentiment that such would be the event ? We cannot suppose the latter ; for Paul informs us that he “ accounted that God was able to *raise him up even from the dead.*” This then was his expectation ; and not that a substitute would be provided. Did he then intend to deceive ? This is not to be admitted. The pious patriarch's mind probably ran forward to the sacrifice of the Lamb of God once in the end of the world for the putting away of sins ;— and this may have had some influence in determining the form of the expression. But his meaning seems to have been simply, that God would take care that the necessary provision,

whatever it might be, should be made. Probably he had no expectation that a *lamb* would actually be provided, and his words proved unconsciously prophetic. The terms he used were conformed to the terms used in Isaac's inquiry ; not to deceive his son, but by expressing his own confidence in God, to inspire him also with the same sentiment.\* It is delightful to notice the easy and pleasant method

\* The following illustration may perhaps serve to set this matter in a somewhat clearer light. Suppose a ship is wrecked at sea, and among the sufferers are a father and son, who contrive to keep above the waves by clinging to some floating fragments, in the hope that succour will at length appear. Hours pass ; and the son having wearied himself with looking around for a friendly sail to come to their rescue, and now almost in despair, cries out—"Father, who will send a boat to save us ?" The father replies, "God will send us a boat, my son," meaning nothing more than this, that he is very confident God in his providence will send them deliverance in some form or other. Such expressions are natural and occur every day in common discourse.

which he takes to lead up Isaac's thoughts to Him who is at all times "a very present help in trouble." This may be only one of ten thousand instances in which he sought to impress the animating truth of man's dependence on God, upon the mind of his son, and cultivate in him a childlike confidence in his power and goodness. Thus gently did he instill into his mind the pure and transforming principles of religion, and prepare him for the part which he was to perform in transmitting the knowledge and worship of God to coming generations.

Isaac was apparently satisfied with his father's answer; and they move silently on till they reach the top of the mountain. All the way, we may suppose, Abraham's heart was lifted up to God in fervent prayer for strength to discharge the dreadful duty to which he had been called; and also for the restoration of the victim. Having arrived at the summit of Moriah, Abraham looks around for a suitable spot for the sacrifice. It is soon discovered. He then proceeds to make the necessary pre-

parations. The altar is built ; the wood is laid in order ; Isaac is bound thereon ; and the father's hand stretched forth to take the knife. What a moment of anguish must this have been to his heart ! One knows not whether to wonder more at the submissiveness of the son, in thus quietly yielding himself up ; or the fortitude of the father in thus resolutely proceeding to take his life. There seems to have been neither resistance on the part of the former, nor hesitation on the part of the latter. We hear of no struggle, no further questioning even from Isaac. It is hardly possible to persuade one's self, however, that all the circumstances of this transaction are recorded. Much must be left for the imagination to supply. Many inquiries may have been proposed, and answered ; many objections urged, and removed. We can scarcely conceive of the young man's suffering the cords to be bound around his limbs, and then quietly lying down upon the altar, without much questioning on the one hand, and much instruction on the other. An anxious and intensely interesting dialogue was

doubtless held between the parent and the child ; but this we can only conjecture. Isaac might have urged, that the act his father was about to perform, would cut off all his hopes, and leave him without name or remembrance on the earth. It would defeat all the promises he had received from God. And looking up in his venerable face, furrowed with years, but beaming with the tenderest affection, what a moving appeal might he make to the compassion of a parent's heart ! Yet the patriarch's firmness was immovable. To every argument and every appeal he returned a ready answer, accompanied with such force of persuasion or such divine authority, that no further objection was offered. Abraham was well acquainted with that most important art of *family government* ; and his son had effectually learned the correlative duty of submission. He had been long accustomed to look upon his father as invested with a certain divine authority, and to receive his commands as inviolable law. Even on this most trying occasion, therefore, he meekly submitted to his father's will.

The fortitude as well as the firmness of

Abraham in this transaction, is, in the highest degree, admirable;—the moral heroism of Brutus in sacrificing his sons to the claims of justice, is not to be mentioned in comparison with it. Looking up to heaven for aid, suppressing the sensibilities and silencing the pleadings of nature, he addresses himself to the dreadful task.

The bosom of the victim is bared; the point of the deadly weapon is applied; the arm is collecting its strength for the fatal thrust; and one moment more will witness the gush of the life blood from the heart. There is a brief pause for the soul to summon all its energy for the mortal act, when a voice, “Abraham! Abraham!” rings like a thunder peal in the father’s ear. His knife falls from his hand, and with that hand uplifted toward heaven, he exclaims with the same prompt submission that had characterized him from the first, “Here am I.” He knew it was the voice which had often been his counsellor: and he yielded at once to whatever message it might bring. The messenger proceeds—“Lay not thine hand

upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him ; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me."

The great object of the trial had been attained. Abraham's trust in God, had been shown to be stronger than his affection for his darling son ; and here the trial was suspended. Nothing more was necessary. The highest possible proof, the most perfect illustration of faith has been given for the instruction of mankind ; for he who would sacrifice his only son in obedience to the divine command, must possess a strength of faith adequate to any trial.

Abraham now lifted up his eyes and discovered a ram caught in a thicket by his horns, at no great distance. This animal he immediately resolved to sacrifice instead of Isaac. Unbinding him therefore from the altar, with feelings of unutterable gratitude and joy, on the part both of the father and the son, he bound the ram and offered it in his stead. And as the smoke of that sacrifice went up to heaven, they doubt-

less prostrated themselves at the foot of the altar, and poured out their hearts in devout and joyful thanksgiving unto God.

According to the custom of the times, the mountain on which this scene was transacted, was called Jehovah-Jireh, *the Lord will provide*, in commemoration of the divine interposition by which Isaac was rescued from death. And down to the time of Moses, it was a common proverb among the Jews. *In the mount it shall be provided*, or, *in seasons of extremity, the Lord shall send relief*.

After this trial, in which the patriarch's virtue shone with such resplendent lustre, he received a new confirmation of the promise, in respect to the multitude, the power, and happiness of his posterity. The promise was not only renewed, but renewed in an enlarged and more definite form. Abraham had proved himself willing, if God required it, to part with his only son;—now he was assured that his seed should be as the stars of heaven, and the sand upon the sea-shore; and what had never before been promised, they were to ex-

ercise dominion over their enemies. Through the Saviour, who was to arise in the line of Isaac's descendants, all the nations of the earth were to be blessed. The whole was now confirmed by an oath, and all *because* Abraham had obeyed the divine command.

With a glad and grateful heart, they now returned to Beersheba, where they sojourned some little time ; and then, as it appears from the sequel, returned to Hebron—the former and the favourite residence of the patriarch.

## CHAPTER XV.

### GENERAL REMARKS ON THE SACRIFICE.

“ Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust him for his grace;  
Behind a frowning Providence,  
He hides a smiling face.  
His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flower.”

*Cowper.*

It is natural to inquire, what could have been the design of God in this transaction? The sacred historian speaks of it as a *temptation*. But the simple meaning of the word is, *trial*. It is not to be regarded in the light of an ordinary temptation. The term employed is the same that is often used in the Scriptures, to represent the discipline by which God in his providence is accustomed to put to the test the fidelity and virtue of his people. Abraham was *moved* to put his son to death, but *divinely* moved, moved by an express command of God.

This is distinguished from ordinary temptation by the very important circumstance, that it proceeded from a *good Being* and was intended for a *good purpose*; whereas what we usually and properly denominate temptation, proceeds from a *bad being* and is intended for a *bad purpose*.

The design of God in this transaction, was, from the beginning, a design of the purest benevolence. It was not to destroy Isaac. He was not permitted to be sacrificed, though on the very point of death. The design may be considered as three-fold.

1. To *try* Abraham's faith for his own good. The transaction was of the nature of wholesome personal discipline, calculated to strengthen every virtuous principle belonging to his character. It was meant to humble him still more, to lead him to a more complete dependence on God, and establish more firmly his confidence in the divine promise.

2. It was doubtless intended to exhibit the character of Abraham in a new and most instructive aspect to the world. God needed no

additional knowledge concerning him, to be derived from such a trial. He knew how he would act under these trying circumstances. The transaction therefore was not designed to draw forth his qualities of heart, his faith, his constancy, his fortitude, his submission, to the divine eye;—but to exhibit them in greater lustre to the eyes of men. Wherever this example should be known, it would serve as a living and most affecting illustration of the power of faith, and an effectual encouragement to all men to obey the divine commands with implicit and unwavering trust, however opposed they may appear to the dictates of unsanctified reason, and the inclinations of a selfish heart. This purpose it has answered beyond all other examples. In the virtual sacrifice of his son, the patriarch's character was rendered *complete*, as a great exemplar of faith, for all subsequent time. As such the New Testament writers appeal to it; and as such it will be appealed to, down to the end of the world. But,

3. There was doubtless a still higher design

even than this. Judicious interpreters have always considered the transaction as a type, or figurative prediction, of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The very place of it, called "the Mount of God," seems to have been marked out as the scene of great events; and of that kind, too, in which a substitutional sacrifice was offered and accepted. It is pleasing to observe among the patriarchs, long before the establishment of the Mosaic ritual, intimations of an atonement. God did not leave himself without witness in those early ages, in respect to his purposes of mercy in the great plan of Redemption. An atoning sacrifice was the chief corner-stone of the scheme of salvation which God had devised; the foundation of all man's hopes concerning any essential improvement in his condition in this life, and, what is infinitely more important, concerning a higher state of happiness in the world to come. It was of the utmost consequence, therefore, to fix the cardinal doctrine of salvation through the blood of a Mediator, deep in the memory and the heart of

mankind ; and to secure this purpose the transaction which has just been detailed was admirably adapted. Such an extraordinary fact connected with the history of a distinguished personage, would become matter of general notoriety and attention.

It is also interesting to notice the points of analogy between the virtual offering of Isaac, and the perfect offering of the Son of God. First, it is supposed by many that both transactions occurred at the same place ; secondly, the age of the victims was nearly the same ; thirdly, both were freely devoted by paternal love, the father giving them up to suffer ; and fourthly, on each, the hopes of the world were suspended, for the promise was connected with both, that in them all the families of the earth should be blessed.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### REFLECTIONS.

“ Blind unbelief is sure to err  
And scan his work in vain ;  
God is his own interpreter,  
And he will make it plain.”

*Cowper.*

WE cannot dismiss this interesting subject without adverting briefly to several considerations connected with it, of great practical interest. The circumstances belonging to it, are generally of an instructive nature, and ought not to be passed by without careful attention.

Previously to the summons which called him to Mount Moriah, Abraham probably supposed that the protracted series of trials with which God had visited him, was at an end. The last that had been laid upon him was the dismission of Ishmael. But now, looking around him, he could perceive nothing which threatened his peace. Isaac had escaped the dangers incident

to early youth, and the Divine promise guaranteed all that he could desire concerning him. In his manly form and blooming countenance, he seemed to read the history of a healthful and vigorous life ; and in his submissive temper and virtuous habits, he discovered what was still more pleasing—the indications of a character worthy of the instructions which he had given. And what now had the father to do, but *enjoy* the long desired fulfilment of his hopes ? But as the last electric volley of the storm is often the most severe, so it was with the trial which was about to break forth, as it were out of a clear and luminous sky, upon the unsuspecting patriarch's head.

The lesson here taught us cannot be mistaken. All men, not excepting the best, are prone to be presuming in seasons of apparent prosperity. But the voice which called Abraham to offer up his son, calls us to remember that every treasure in our possession we hold not as our own, but only at the will of the great Proprietor of all things. We are here instructed to be humble in prosperity, and so to

hold the dearest objects of our affection, that we may be able cheerfully to resign them.

We have in Abraham's conduct on this occasion an instructive example of acquiescence in the divine will. Whatever may have been his state of mind before the trial came, he yielded to it without a murmur. "Behold, here I am," was his language. He was ready to hear the divine communication, whatever might be its import, and to bear the burden that was to be imposed, however overwhelming might be its weight. His soul was nerved to bear it before it was laid upon him. He offered no opposition ; he uttered no complaint ; he betrayed no weakness. His natural affections were not extinguished ; but they were subjected to the higher principle of faith ; and every power, passion, and thought of his mind seems to have been brought into subordination to the will of God. In a world like this, how necessary is such a spirit both to our comfort and to the faithful performance of our duty ! It is the secret of that peace of mind, that settled, unruffled composure under all circumstances of

life, which we sometimes, though not uniformly find in the pious and devout. Let the mind be fixed on God with a firm belief in his infinite wisdom and an humble reliance on his mercy ; and then, whatever may be the allotments of his Providence, we may exult in the triumphant language of the Psalmist, “ we will not fear though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the seas.”

Again : we have, in this narrative, an example of prompt and implicit obedience, worthy of all imitation. How many objections might Abraham have raised against a compliance with the divine direction to go and offer up his son ! He might have urged, that it would be a heinous crime ;—an unnatural crime ;—it would serve as an encouragement to crime ;—it would leave an everlasting blot upon his character ;—it would defeat the purposes of God ;—and it would extinguish the hopes of the world. At all events, some time must be taken for deliberation. Friends must be consulted,—consequences must be weighed,—and the mind prepared for the issue.

But in the example of Abraham, there is nothing of this. He had received a plain command from heaven. He was fully convinced that the command was from God, and it was expressed in the most intelligible form. It left no room whatever for doubt. The duty to which it called him could not be mistaken. Every thing belonging to his duty in the matter, was as clear as the light of day ; although the reasons and the consequences were veiled in the darkness of midnight. But these did not belong to his province. *Duty* was his ; *reasons* and *results* were God's. There was, therefore, no confidence, no deliberation, no delay. *Early in the morning*,—and this circumstance is worthy of special remembrance, —early in the morning, the good man arose, prepared himself in haste, and set forth to execute the task assigned him.

This noble example of implicit and prompt obedience, we ought carefully to imitate. Our first duty is always, *to ascertain our duty*. When this is revealed to us by express and full directions, then we have nothing to do but

*to act.* When it is not, then we are to inquire, examine, and spare no pains to learn it. When duty is ascertained, then we must suffer nothing to lie in the way of its performance. If God has spoken, we are to listen, learn, and obey. Reason and inclination may plead loudly in opposition; but if God has spoken, if duty calls, the ear must be deaf to every opposing voice. This great principle should be established in every heart,—the principle of universal obedience to the voice of God, of universal compliance with the calls of duty.

Again: this subject teaches us a beautiful lesson of filial subjection and piety. Isaac, in the hour of trial, resisted not, but meekly yielded himself for the sacrifice. He seems to have been led as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth to give utterance to a single murmur. How can we account for this, but by supposing that he had been trained most strictly to submit to his parents' will? The habit of subjection and obedience had unquestionably been firmly established. God did not

mistake in predicting that Abraham would "command his children and his household after him." Hence his son refused not to do and to suffer whatever, agreeably to the divine command, his father laid upon him. How meekly did he bear the wood up the steep ascent of the mountain ! How meekly, too, did he lay himself down upon the altar, and wait for the fatal knife to perform its bloody office !

It seems reasonable to conclude that Isaac was himself at this time a devout believer in the God of his father. Such an example of piety as was always present before him, could not fail to make a deep impression on his heart. He would not, he dared not disobey one, who he knew acted under the immediate guidance of the Almighty hand. His father's authority here was the authority of God ; and he quietly submitted himself to the divine disposal. It is enough indeed to produce a shudder, to think of what was about to be inflicted on Isaac. Nevertheless, he submitted ; and we have seen the happy result. Such will uniformly be the operation of obedience to parents. The com-

mandment which requires it, is a commandment with promise. This instructive lesson ought to be deeply engraven on the heart of every youth.

Another lesson taught by this narrative is, that trials, meekly borne, even where they may appear fatal to all our cherished hopes, and obedience promptly rendered to the divine commands, however mysterious and apparently unreasonable, will brighten into blessings, and secure a rich reward in the end. Abraham was tried far beyond the common severity of human trials. He gave up his son—his only son—whom he loved—to be offered on the altar. But the trial he was not only enabled to endure,—but at the very crisis, it was completely removed. Just as he was about to drink the bitter cup, it was kindly taken from his lips. The blow which was about to prostrate all his hopes, was turned aside and made the means of their firmer establishment. His son, now virtually sacrificed, was restored to him as if from the dead—his life still untouched. The moment of extremity was to him a

moment of mercy. Thus God compassionately remembers his afflicted children, and never wants means to relieve them in the hour of their necessity. They who affectionately trust in him shall not be forsaken ; and all things shall work together for their good.

Abraham obeyed :—and not only did he thus set the seal of sincerity on his faith, and secure to himself the imputation of righteousness ; but he received a fresh and a fuller confirmation of the promise, which unfolded to his eye the glory of his lineage. “ By myself have I sworn,” said the Lord, “ for *because thou hast done this thing*, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son ; that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed, as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore ; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies. And in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed ; *because thou hast obeyed my voice.*” He obeyed :—and all the evils which he might have feared as the result of his obedience in this extraordinary case, were

averted ; his hands were not stained with the blood of his son ; but he took him back to his bosom with increased assurance of his future prosperity ; his character, so far from suffering aspersion, shone forth with redoubled lustre ; the promise of God, instead of a defeat, received another impress of the confirmatory seal ; and the hopes of the world, instead of being extinguished, grew brighter in the light reflected from this symbol of the great atoning sacrifice.

Thus he who faithfully obeys the commands of God, and walks by faith rather than by sight, shall be safely guided, graciously approved, and richly rewarded. Let there be faith as strong, and obedience as prompt as the patriarch's, and the blessing of God shall be as certainly secured. “For blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.”

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE DEATH OF SARAH.

“ To lie down  
In this dark pit she cometh, dust to dust,  
Ashes to ashes, till the glorious morn  
Of resurrection.”

“ Thy rest shall be  
In such companionship as thou hast loved  
Even from thy being’s dawn ; pure breathing plants,  
Soft melodies of waters and of trees,  
The brightest, holiest charms of earth and sky—  
Nor yet unchronicled, nor unbeloved  
Of faithful memory.”

*Sigourney.*

FROM his journey to Mount Moriah, Abraham returned to Beersheba ; but soon removed thence, as it would appear to the neighbourhood of Hebron. In the meantime, he was refreshed with intelligence from Haran concerning his brother Nahor’s family. Communication in those times was slow and difficult between distant places ; but near relatives nevertheless had the satisfaction sometimes of

hearing from one another, though remotely separated. Abraham was not a man lightly to esteem such a privilege as this; nor was the reception of intelligence from his brother deemed, by the sacred historian, too trivial a matter to occupy a place on the inspired page.

Soon after the patriarch's removal to Hebron, he was visited with a new and heavy affliction. His trials were not yet at an end. Indeed it was with him, as it is with all men of every age,—his life was but a series of trials more or less severe, with brief and lucid intervals between them. For a long course of years, he had enjoyed the society of one, who, with all her weaknesses, had contributed not a little to his comfort and happiness, as they shared together the joys and sorrows of their pilgrim-life. Sarah was not wanting in the amiable qualities of her sex; and their long connexion and mutual participation of the good and ill which the hand of Providence had apportioned them, had bound them to each other with no ordinary tie. But now, after travelling together in their

wanderings, from early life up to the age of more than six score years, one is to be left behind, while the other pursues his pilgrimage alone. Death at last must sever the tie—the tenderest tie which belongs to earthly relations. It is affecting to think of such a separation, though the event lies far off, beyond the interval of thirty-seven centuries. Time has not changed the nature of man ; and we can sympathise with the patriarch in his bereavement, as if it had occurred but yesterday, and in our own neighbourhood.

Of the circumstances of Sarah's death, we are left in ignorance. But probably at the age of one hundred and twenty-seven years, nature gradually gave way, and the lamp of life went out by degrees. It may perhaps be inferred from the inspired account, that Abraham was absent at the time, and had not the mournful pleasure of comforting her in her decline and closing her eyes in death. But he “came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her.” Much cause had he to mourn, and his tears were tears of unfeigned sorrow. There is a holy

grief which we may lawfully indulge. Abraham wept over the remains of Sarah. Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus. But we hear not a syllable of complaint. He mourned in silent anguish; and the heart that refused not to offer up the son, repined not at the loss of the wife.

The last trying office remained to be performed. A suitable resting place must be sought for the remains, where they must be hidden from human sight for ever. Abraham, therefore, “stood up before his dead,” and in language of most touching simplicity, desired to purchase a burying-place, that he might “bury his dead out of his sight.”

It was common in ancient times, when a person died, to place the body, shrouded in grave clothes, upon a bier bedecked with flowers near the door of the tent or dwelling. There it remained, while the relatives and friends came to weep over it, till it was necessary to convey it to the tomb. Possibly all that is meant by Abraham’s “coming” to mourn for Sarah, is that he came from his tent

to look upon her for the last time and give proper utterance to his grief. There perhaps the sons of Heth, who dwelt in the neighbourhood, had come to show their respect for the deceased ; and it was of them the patriarch sought to purchase a burial place. “ I am a stranger and a sojourner with you,” said he mournfully ; for he felt more deeply than ever that he was a lonely pilgrim on the earth.

The manner in which the sons of Heth treated Abraham, evinces in how high estimation he was held. To his proposal they reply, —“ Thou art a mighty prince among us : in the choice of our sepulchres, bury thy dead : none of us shall withhold from thee his sepulchre.” They could not refuse him so reasonable a request ; and indeed such was their respect for his character, they deemed it a privilege to oblige him. The sons of Heth, though ignorant of God, saw in his devoted servant much that commanded their veneration. He sojourned among them as a being of higher rank. His heavenly virtues awakened their wonder and won their confidence. This is

perhaps more than good men can always justly expect from a wicked world; but generally it is true, that “when a man’s ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.”

The patriarch gratefully acknowledged their kindness. With a courteousness which shows the most refined and elevated feelings, “he stood up and bowed himself to the people of the land,” and declining the burial place as a gift, begged that he might be allowed to purchase it of Ephron. Ephron, on the other hand, with equal courtesy, besought him to accept it freely, and formally presented it to him in the presence of his brethren. Again the patriarch bowed himself down before the sons of Heth, in token of his gratitude; but insisted that Ephron should receive a suitable compensation. Ephron, overcome at length by his urgency, named the price which the sepulchre was worth. The sum named was four hundred shekels of silver, equal to about two hundred dollars. The money was immediately *weighed* out, for money was then reck-

oned by weight,—and the property was made over to Abraham with due formalities in the presence of a competent number of witnesses. Thus the cave of Machpelah, situated near Mamre, together with the surrounding field and groves, became the possession of Abraham and his descendants, for a family burial-place.—There he deposited the remains of Sarah, and there nearly fifty years afterward, his own were placed beside them. There were also buried Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah.

The ancient sepulchres were generally caves in the rock, either the work of nature or of art. Sometimes they were cut into the solid mass in the acclivity of a hill, presenting several chambers within, formed with perfect regularity and incredible labour, extending a great distance under ground, and capable of receiving a vast number of bodies. Sepulchres of this description are now frequently found in the East, excavated several thousand years ago, yet as fresh and beautiful as if they were the work of yesterday. Of this sort, though probably somewhat more roughly wrought, was the cave of Machpelah.

The care which Abraham took of the remains of Sarah, exhibits an interesting trait in his character. His affection did not terminate with the life of its object. What ideas he had of a future state of being, we cannot accurately determine. It is not to be doubted, however, that he believed in the future existence of the soul. Yet, while he must have regarded the soul as infinitely more to be valued than the body, he did not treat the body with neglect. He was anxious to provide for it a decent resting-place. It is a mark of a noble mind. He who does not respect the dead will rarely be found to deserve the respect of the living. We may imagine that it is of little consequence, where the body moulders, when the spirit has departed ; but a proper regard for the dead is so interwoven with other feelings in the heart, that it cannot be extinguished without general injury to character.

Such an event as the death of his wife, could not fail to remind Abraham strongly of his own mortality. Thus the Providence of God read to him a solemn lesson, and pointed him

to the approaching termination of his course on earth. It warned him to accomplish without delay whatever remained to be done for the good of Isaac, or to put his own soul in readiness for eternity. Death is at all times an impressive monitor ; how much more impressive, when it snatches from the husband's bosom the partner of his life !

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE CLOSING EVENTS OF ABRAHAM'S LIFE.

“ Farewell

Blessed and full of days. No more thy prayer  
Up through the solitude of night shall pass  
To bless thy children's children—nor thy soul  
Yearn for reunion with those kindred ones  
Who went to rest before thee—'Twas not meet  
That thou shouldst tarry longer from that bliss  
Which God reserveth for the pure in heart.”

*Sigourney.*

ONE important duty remained to be performed, before Abraham could quietly compose himself to die. His life might indeed be prolonged for many years; but then, he was well aware, it was dangerous to delay. Isaac was now forty years old, and no suitable companion could be found for him among the inhabitants of the land. They were idolatrous; and to take a wife from an ungodly family for one who was to continue the line which God had established to perpetuate the knowledge and worship of his own name among men, would

be both unreasonable and impious. According to the custom of the times, it was incumbent on the father to make the selection. This duty no doubt gave the patriarch much solicitude. He would not, in a matter of such momentous consequence, neglect to seek by prayer for divine direction. His object was not wealth, nor honour, nor personal attractions, nor princely rank ; but a wife for his son of kindred feelings, who would readily imbibe correct principles of religion. God “ had blessed him in all things ;” and he was confident, while faithful himself in the performance of his duty, that the divine blessing would continue to rest on his family. That confidence, nevertheless, did not degenerate into presumption. He knew he had no reason to expect prosperity among his descendants, if he allowed his son to form a vicious connexion. Happy would it be for society, if all parents, in a matter so important, would exercise the watchful and pious care of Abraham. It is true, the customs of the times have changed ; but not so changed as to close the parent’s lips nor

annul his authority. The voice of persuasion might often succeed where the tone of command would fail; and the son or daughter might be directed in the way of safety by kindness, though stern and imperious dictation might destroy the peace which it was intended to secure.

Nahor's family at Haran, seem to have been in some measure imbued with the true spirit of religion. Yet, there is reason to believe, there was much of error mingled with the truth in their minds; and, on the whole, we may conclude that their religion was a compound system, partly idolatrous and partly spiritual. We find\* that Laban, the grandson of Nahor and father of Rachel, had "images," teraphim, and no doubt paid them some sort of religious worship; and yet from what is known of his history, he would appear to have been one of the most devout of the family.† But if they were not spiritual worshipers of the true God, they were in a good measure free

\* Gen. xxxi. 19.

† Gen. xxiv. 31. 50, 51.

from the superstitious notions and corrupt practices of other tribes ; and might reasonably be expected to embrace a purer system and become vitally interested in it, whenever they should be more fully instructed. Consequently, no serious evil could be apprehended from such a connexion with it, as Abraham proposed to form for his son. The circumstances of this connexion deserve to be seriously studied and pondered by all parents who desire the blessing of God to rest upon their children from generation to generation. “ What fellowship hath light with darkness ? ”

Abraham, now far advanced in life, looking back on the long course of prosperity through which the Lord had led him, and desirous that the same prosperity might be the portion of his descendants, knowing that he must soon die and exert no further influence on the destinies of his family, called to him the eldest servant of his house, supposed to be Eliezer of Damascus who held the rank of steward, and made him engage, under a solemn oath, that he would take the necessary measures to pro-

cure for Isaac a wife from among his own "kindred," and not among the Canaanites. By his own kindred, he meant the household of Nahor at Haran. He chose that this trusty servant should go to Haran and make the selection, rather than Isaac himself; lest the young man should be tempted to remain there. It is remarkable what confidence was reposed in the servant's wisdom and integrity; and it furnishes a fine illustration of the treatment which this class of dependents anciently received at the hand of their masters. Eliezer was intrusted with the most important duty of the father himself. A responsibility under which a parent might have trembled, for the most momentous consequence were depending on it, was transferred to him.

Eliezer lost no time; but immediately undertook the journey. With ten camels, an inventory of his master's estate, a considerable company of under-servants, and a sufficient quantity of provisions for some weeks' travel, he departed and, in due time, arrived in Mesopotamia. Before entering the city of Nahor,

he caused his caravan to rest at a well, and there lifted up his heart to God for divine direction in his undertaking. This aged servant was evidently a sharer in his master's piety. His request was, that the damsel that should come forth to the well with a pitcher on her shoulder, according to the custom of the times, and who, being desired to let down her pitcher to give him drink, should not only politely comply with his request, but propose to give his camels drink also, might prove to be the one whom God in his providence would appoint to be the wife of Isaac. Immediately, even while he was yet speaking, there came forth from the gate a young and beautiful maiden with a pitcher upon her shoulder to draw water. In all that followed, the desire of Eliezer was exactly answered. Being asked to give him drink, the maiden courteously offered to draw water also for his camels ; and such was her dignity and grace, that the faithful servant was not merely soon convinced that the Lord had made his journey prosperous, but filled with admiration and delight. Respectfully approach-

ing her, he placed a golden ear-ring and bracelets of gold in her hands, and inquired who she was, and whether he could be accommodated with his company at her father's house. A mutual explanation now took place; Nahor's family were informed of the arrival of the little caravan from the land of Abraham; and the strangers were introduced and entertained with great joy. The business was speedily arranged and completed. Rebekah, who had met the company at the well, was cheerfully given up, and she herself as cheerfully consented to go. They all, we cannot doubt, had the highest respect for Abraham. Probably, it was through his influence before he left his native country, that they were made acquainted, in some degree, with the true doctrines of religion; and the memory of his piety and extraordinary virtues still remained fresh and fragrant among the descendants of Nahor. There was no hesitation, therefore, on the part of the parents, Bethuel and his wife, in relinquishing their daughter to become a daughter to the patriarch, nor on her part to leave her father's

house for the honour of so truly respectable a connexion. The statements of the servant, and the intelligence which they had not improbably received concerning the prosperity of Abraham, must have increased their assurance. Rebekah, therefore, was sent away with a light heart and a warm blessing, accompanied by several maid servants for her especial use. Many days elapsed before they reached the land of Canaan. At last, Rebekah caught a glimpse of the hills of Hebron ; and after winding for some time through their valleys, she discovered signs of careful cultivation. Yonder was the settlement of Abraham. As yet, however, she had made no inquiries ; but as she rode along in silence upon her camel surrounded with her maidens, carefully observed every object that met her view. Presently her eye was attracted by something moving with slow and measured step, in a grove by the way side, and apparently approaching the spot where they were. It was evening, and the shades were deepening among the olive trees, obscuring though not concealing the objects around them. Having

ascertained from the servant that it was Isaac, she “ lighted off her camel,” covering herself with a veil in token of respect and submission, and thus, with admirable modesty, was presented to her lord. The connexion proved a happy one, far beyond what sober calculators would be likely to predict. Rebekah was industrious, amiable, and virtuous. That she had been trained to industrious habits, is evident from the fact that she was found at the well drawing water for the family. It is one of the absurdities of our times, that such useful labours are accounted dishonourable among females of rank and refinement. We would not go back to barbarism; but a lesson or two from Sarah and Rebekah would be quite as profitable to most of our modern brides, as years of training under the exquisites of France and Italy. On the other hand, Isaac appears to have been gentle, contemplative, and pious. The union, therefore, though founded on no previous acquaintance, yet having its origin in piety and prayer, was a union of congenial hearts, and fruitful in the enjoyments of wedded life.

Abraham must have been greatly gratified, on seeing his last and most anxious wish so amply fulfilled. Yet, having now less of Isaac's society than before, he began, we may presume, to languish for want of the fostering care of a familiar companion. And it is not altogether extraordinary, that under these circumstances, he should seek another wife to cherish and comfort him in his old age. Accordingly, he married Keturah—a woman of whom nothing is certainly known, except that she became the mother of six sons. Some suppose that she was Hagar, who, after the settlement of Ishmael in Arabia, returned to her former master. It is generally believed that she was one of Abraham's house-servants.

This portion of the patriarch's history is left by the sacred writers in perfect obscurity. It would have been delightful, and, we can hardly doubt, instructive in the highest degree, to follow him through the last scenes of his protracted life; to trace the progressive improvement of his character; to observe his virtues shining on and gathering perhaps new and increas-

ing beauty, though beaming with a somewhat softer effulgence, till, like the setting sun, they disappeared at last in a flood of glory. But this pleasure we are not permitted to enjoy. A veil is thrown over the closing scene; and all that we can know, is, that having shown to the last his solicitude to provide for Isaac's security in his possessions, by sending away the sons of Keturah to the distant east, after loading them with gifts, he died at the age of one hundred and seventy-five years, "and being gathered to his people," his body was laid to rest by the side of his beloved Sarah, in the cave of Machpelah.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### GENERAL VIEW OF ABRAHAM'S CHARACTER.

“Rise, O my soul, pursue the path,  
By ancient worthies trod ;  
Aspiring, view those holy men,  
Who lived and walked with God.  
Though dead, they speak in reason’s ear,  
And in example live ;  
Their faith, and hope, and mighty deeds,  
Still fresh instruction give.”

*Needham.*

THE most remarkable and distinguishing feature in the patriarch’s character, is undoubtedly his *faith*. It is for this especially that he is commended in the Scriptures. He is there called the “Father of the Faithful.” His “faith was reckoned unto him for righteousness.”

But how was this virtue manifested ? It was particularly manifested in his giving immediate credence to the divine word, when called to forsake his kindred and his father’s house. He received the direction as a matter of unques-

tionable verity and binding force. As an unsuspecting, confiding child yields at once to the truth and authority of a father's command, so did Abraham yield to the truth and authority of the command of God. Such is invariably the character of scriptural faith. Whatever doctrine, precept, promise, or threatening, is revealed to it from heaven, it receives it without hesitation, not simply as a truth, but as a vital principle. Abraham's faith, however, was not merely manifested in the instance cited, but in numerous other instances, which every reader will be able to recall.

It is an interesting inquiry, how far Abraham's faith was of an *erangelical* nature; in other words, to what extent it included a knowledge of, and a reliance on, the future Saviour of the world. It cannot be questioned that, among the objects of his faith, a Saviour who should arise in the line of his own descendants, and should make an atonement for mankind, stood prominent, if not pre-eminent. Jesus Christ expressly says, "Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it and was glad."

And Paul says, speaking of Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham, “These all died in *faith*, not having received the promises, but having seen them *afar off*, and were *persuaded* of them, and *embraced* them.” This settles the question, and makes it a matter of certainty, that Abraham, with those other patriarchs, were true and intelligent believers in a future Messiah. And, though his faith included much more than that single doctrine, it is evident that the doctrine of a future redemption was peculiarly the doctrine of his delight. It is hardly to be doubted, that the sacrifices which he offered had reference to it, and that it gave new and peculiar interest to the promise of a numerous seed, in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed.

The patriarch was also distinguished for the *activity* of his faith. This, indeed, belongs to the nature of the principle. No sooner did he become acquainted with the divine will, than he proceeded instantly to act upon it. He did not content himself with simply *believing*. In leaving his native country, in offering Isaac,

and on many other occasions, he proved that faith was with him a principle of action and not merely of credence. And such likewise is scriptural faith. It prompts obedience and lays a foundation for a character conformed to the will of God.

Abraham was also distinguished for his *promptitude* of action. He did not wait to confer with his fellow men; to watch the current of public opinion or popular favour, or even to calculate consequences. The moment he had ascertained what God required of him, that moment he set himself about the duty, whatever it might be. So in all ages, when, according to the great principles of the Bible, duty is ascertained, obedience is to be rendered promptly and fearlessly. This also belongs to the nature of genuine faith.

The patriarch's *submission*, if it is to be regarded as a distinct virtue, is scarcely less remarkable. Not a complaining word is heard to escape from his lips. When difficulties arise between him and Lot, when the son of promise is demanded in sacrifice, and when

Sarah dies and is borne away to the tomb—he still possesses his soul in patience and submits himself unto God.

*Disinterestedness* was another remarkable trait in his character. When the question arose whether himself or his nephew, should remove for the sake of peace, he sought no personal advantage, but lest Lot to choose with unrestricted freedom. He was ready to recede even from his rights, and to make a sacrifice of interest, for their common benefit. He submitted to take the lower place, though, in justice, the higher belonged to him. O that a jarring world would allow itself to be impressed with such a lesson of meekness and wisdom!

He was manifestly a man of an *amiable* and *affectionate temper*, with all his firmness and fortitude. So far as we are permitted to look into the privacy of his domestic life, we perceive in all his intercourse both as a husband and a father, the plainest marks of tenderness and love. Possibly it was from an excess of tenderness, that he listened to the request of his wife to proclaim her his sister. Here, per-

haps, was the weak point, at which the only serious delinquencies recorded in his history, found their way into his life ; so that

“ E'en his failings leaned to virtue's side.”

The strength of his attachments is particularly manifest in his grief for Ishmael, when it became necessary to send him away with his mother, to preserve the peace of the family. His conduct on that occasion bespoke all a father's heart. Indeed, were his domestic history laid fully open to our view, we should doubtless discover in him a model of rare excellence in all the relations of life.

Abraham has always been regarded as a singular example of true *courtesy of manners*. The respect which he uniformly paid to superiors, the civility which he manifested to all, his ready hospitality, his unfailing and universal kindness, gave a fine finish to his otherwise admirable character. When the angels came to warn him of the approaching overthrow of the cities of the plain, he rose up to

meet them and bowed himself to the ground, though totally unaware, at that time, of their superhuman dignity. He moreover entertained them, not with lavish, but with cheerful hospitality. With similar courteousness, he treated the sons of Heth in the purchase of a sepulchre. Running through all his conduct, there are at once a nobleness and a gentleness of feeling rarely found so beautifully blended. His lofty soul would not take even a shoe-latchet from his conquered enemies, nor accept the *gift* of a burial place from the Hittite. Yet he could yield up his own just rights to Lot with the most condescending humility.

We should do injustice to this great man, did we not give prominence to his missionary services. His name must be placed at the head of *foreign missionaries*; for he was the first sent forth to a distant land, (distant it was according to the ideas of that age,) a bearer and promulgator of the true religion. For this office he had extraordinary qualifications; and although we cannot judge of his success, in the absence of all testimony, yet the wide-

spread fame of his virtues, preserved even down to the present day among most of the tribes of central Asia, are an indication that his labours were not without their effect: at all events, it is clear, that he imprinted the record of his noble virtues in characters indelible on the memories and the hearts of men, securing their respect to him, if not to the religion which he taught. In this age of missionary effort, let the character of this great prototype in the cause, be faithfully studied. The faith which sustained him through every trial; the spirit which secured him the friendship of kings and the favour of all mankind; and the unfailing protection of Heaven under which he passed through every peril of his pilgrimage in safety; furnish topics of meditation of the highest importance to all his followers in the same field of labour.

How cheerfully he obeyed the call—"Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred and from thy father's house." And does not God utter the same call with an almost audible voice, to many a young man who is reluctant to break away from the endearments of home,

and meet the toils and hardships of a missionary life in a foreign land? "Arise, he calleth thee," young man of promise! thee, whose heart has been touched with the fire of divine love, and taught to yearn over the helplessness and horrors of the heathen world. Turn not a deaf ear to the summons. Let not the delights of "thy country and thy father's house" seduce thee from thy duty. With the faith of the patriarch saint, follow the steps of the patriarch missionary; and the same **ALMIGHTY ONE** shall be "thy shield and thy exceeding great reward."

In short, in the patriarch are beautifully exemplified those three fundamental graces, "faith, hope, charity." His *faith*, as we have seen, opened his soul to the communications and influences of heaven, gave impulse to obedience, and nourished all the other virtues of his character. His *hope*, though sometimes ready to sink, still sustained him through the long series of trials by which his character was consolidated. His *charity* appeared beaming with mild lustre in every act of his recorded

life, and imparting warmth and grace to every other excellence. It was the charity which “ suffereth long, and is kind, which envieth not ; vaunteth not itself ; is not puffed up ; doth not behave itself unseemly ; seeketh not her own ; is not easily provoked ; thinketh no evil ; —beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.”

## CHAPTER XX.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS.

How sweet the hallowed memory of the Just—  
Like odorous breathings from a spicy shore !  
In earth's cold bosom long has slept their dust,—  
Yet e'en on earth they live for evermore.  
Their virtues, like a star of purest ray,  
Shine o'er the waste of time with quickening light,  
To guide our wandering feet in wisdom's way,  
And cheer the saddest hour of sorrow's night.

*Anon.*

IT is an obvious reflection from the foregoing history, that the world is largely indebted to Abraham, or rather to the favour which God showed him, for all that is now most to be valued in the condition and prospects of mankind. There was a time, when he seems to have been the only devout, praying, holy man in existence. He was led forth by the hand of God to be the head and father of a holy race. On this single, slender link, therefore, hung the destinies of all coming generations. By divine aid he fulfilled the high trust committed to him, with all its amazing responsibilities. He an-

swered the design of God in every situation in which he was placed ; and by his faithful obedience, opened the channel, whereby all spiritual blessings were to flow down from age to age, and be at length diffused abroad among the whole human family. Every generation ought, therefore, to regard the patriarch with deep and grateful respect. How much more worthy is he of admiration, than any of the heroes, whose names, though they have been echoed through the earth, have been accompanied with the groans of widows and of orphans !

Again, we may reflect on the unspeakable privilege of having God for a guide and protector. Abraham puts himself under his guidance from the time when he first listened to his voice. And he never had occasion to lament the choice he had made. The Lord led him, it is true, by a way he knew not, through devious courses, and seems sometimes trying in the extreme ; yet, the confiding, patient patriarch found him always faithful to his promise, that he would be his “ shield, and his exceeding great reward.”

And such is the uniform experience of those who imitate the patriarch in his faith and obedience. The Lord knoweth them that are his. He did not forsake Noah amid the deluge, nor Abraham in a strange land, nor his descendants in Egypt. On the mount of Sacrifice as well as at the altar in Bethel, he was present to bestow his blessing. They who humbly trust in his mercy, shall rejoice in his salvation.

Finally, it is always safe to obey the voice of God. It is the part of human nature, to doubt and hesitate, when God speaks, though it be in the clearest and most intelligible manner. Men are too apt to weigh opinions and consequences against the divine commands ; to consult convenience and expediency, even when duty is plain upon the most obvious principles ; and to wait for favourable times, when God's time is the present moment. Had Abraham delayed, and conferred with his friends, and looked forward to probable results, the divine purposes, for aught we can see, would necessarily have been defeated. But, trusting in

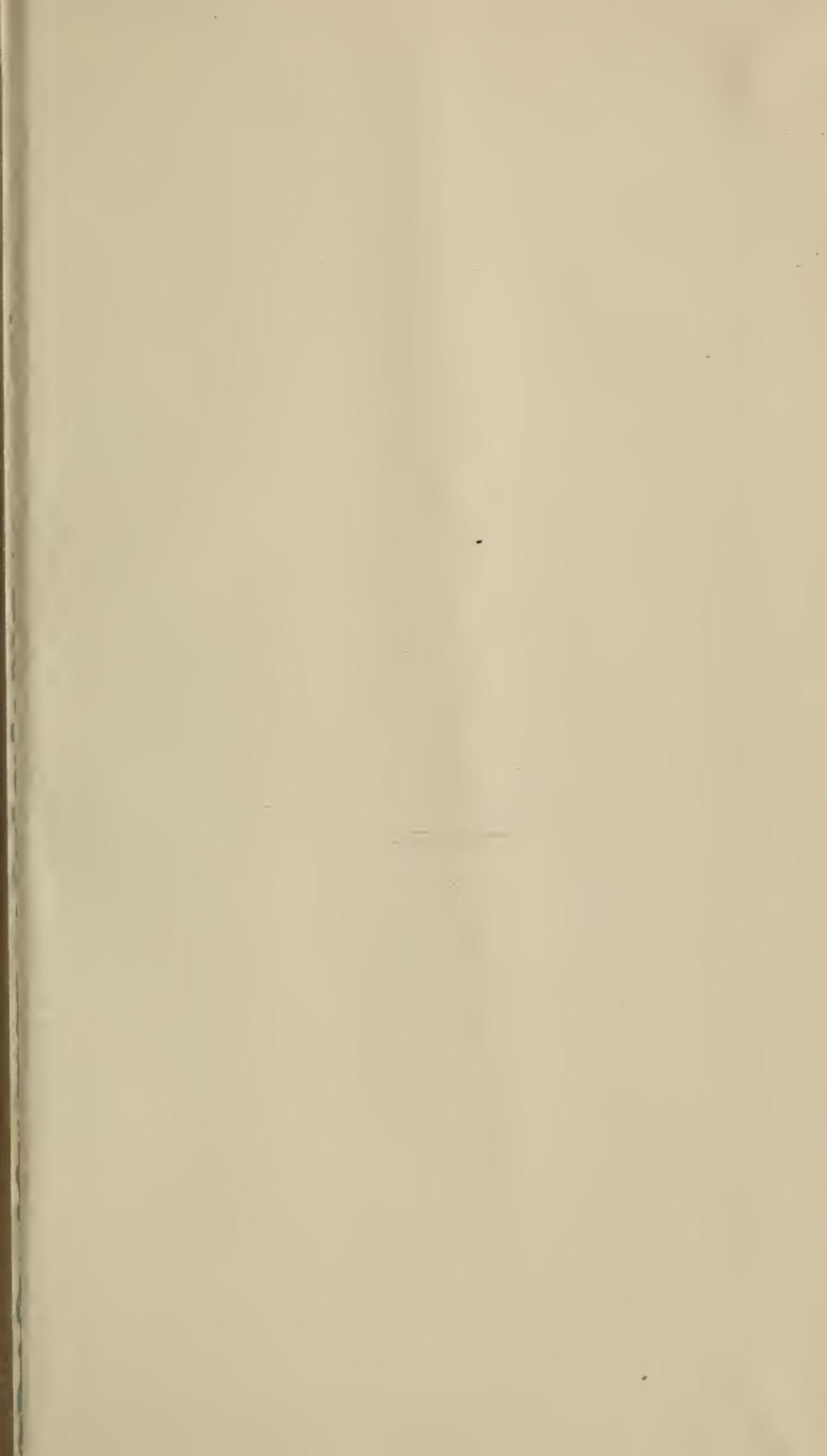
God, he obeyed the command without delay ; and everlasting blessings crowned his obedience. The evils which he might have feared, vanished before him, and mercies more than he could have hoped were bestowed, as he went boldly on his way following with undeviating steps the path of duty.

Thus he secured the favour of God for himself and his posterity. Thus he became a fountain of blessings to the world. And among almost all nations, his name is preserved in grateful remembrance. He will be regarded down to the end of time as one of the greatest benefactors of his race, and throughout eternity he will stand in the highest rank in glory.

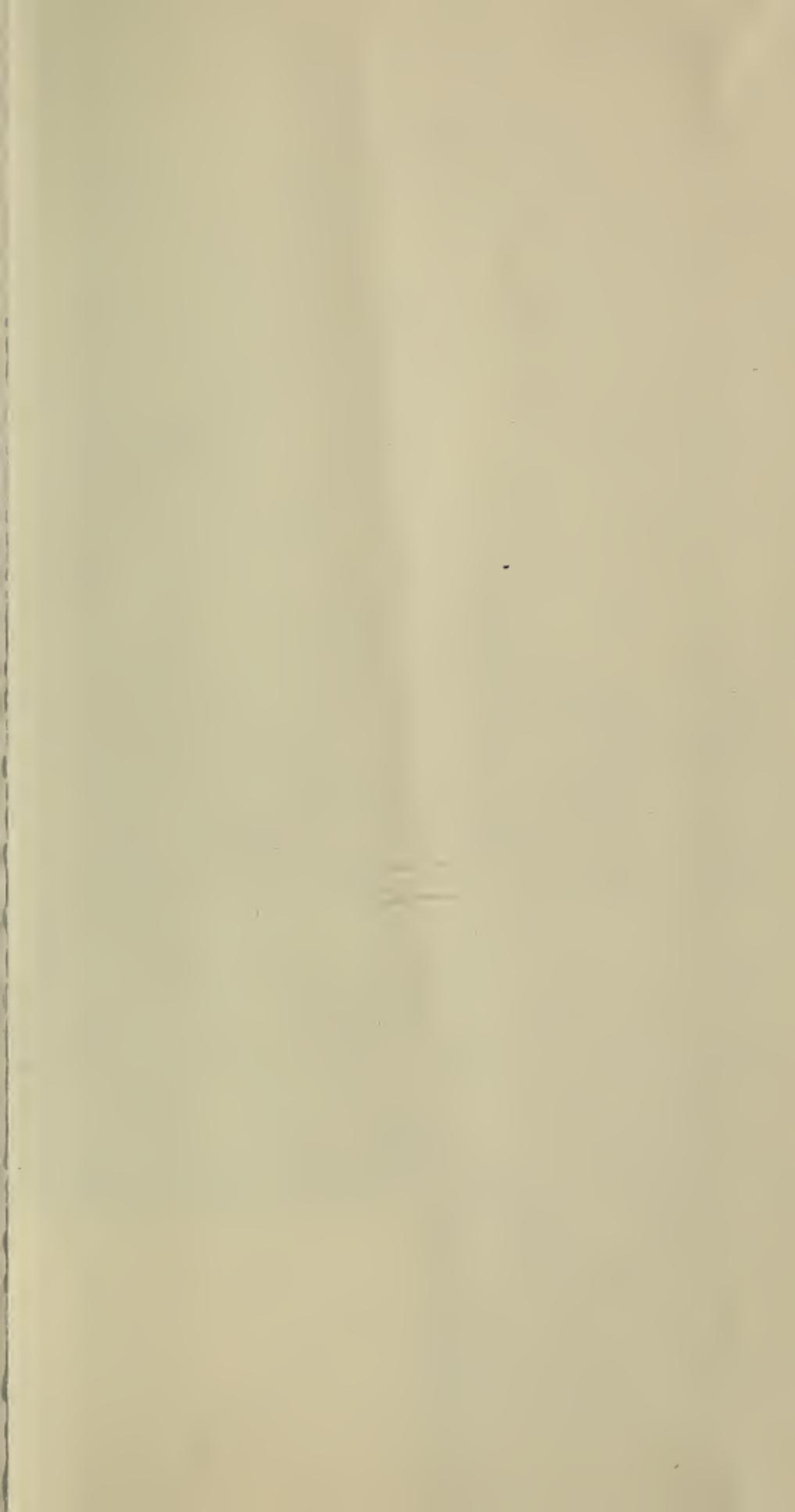
“ In the life of Abraham, we find an epitome of the whole *law of nature*, of the *written law*, and of the *Gospel of Christ*. He has manifested in his own person those virtues for which reason and philosophy could scarcely find out names, when striving to sketch the character of their sophist—a wise or perfect man. ‘ Philosophy itself,’ says Ambrose, ‘ could not equal in its descriptions and wishes, what was exem-

plified by this man in the whole of his conduct.' As soon as he hears the voice of God, he girds himself to the work. *Not a moment is lost.*" Let us, in imitation of his example, bow with all humility to the authority of God; and leaving events in the hands of him who doeth all things well, follow, without hesitation or fear, the directions of his word, and the openings of his providence. So may we attain the same high eminence of piety, and be joined at last to the same glorious company of saints.

THE END.





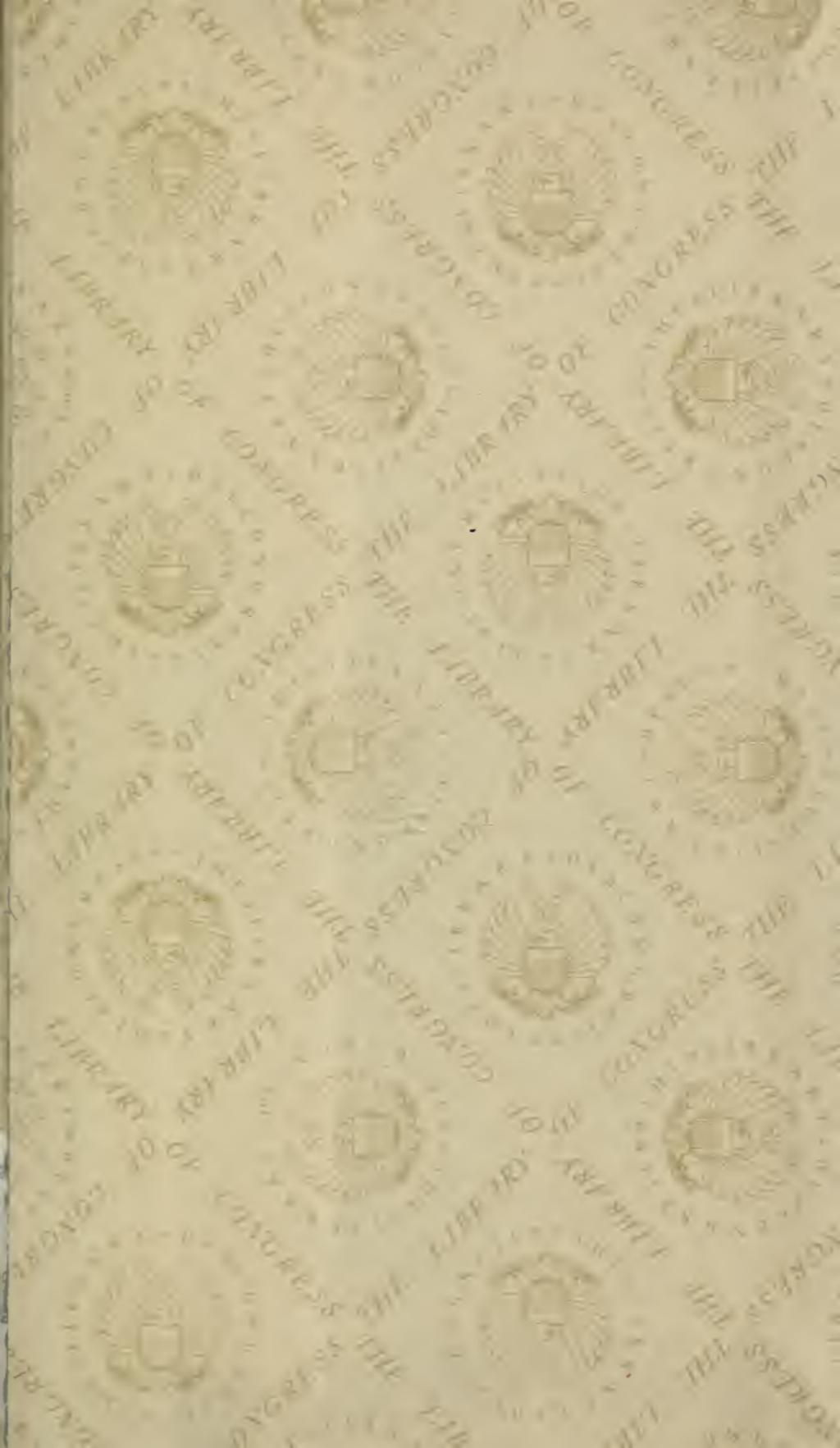


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